ELLERY QUEEN'S

Mystery Magazine

NOVEMBER 50c

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NEW Nicky Welt NOVELET

by HARRY KEMELMAN

author of
FRIDAY THE RABBI SLEPT LATE
and
SATURDAY THE RABBI WENT HUNGRY

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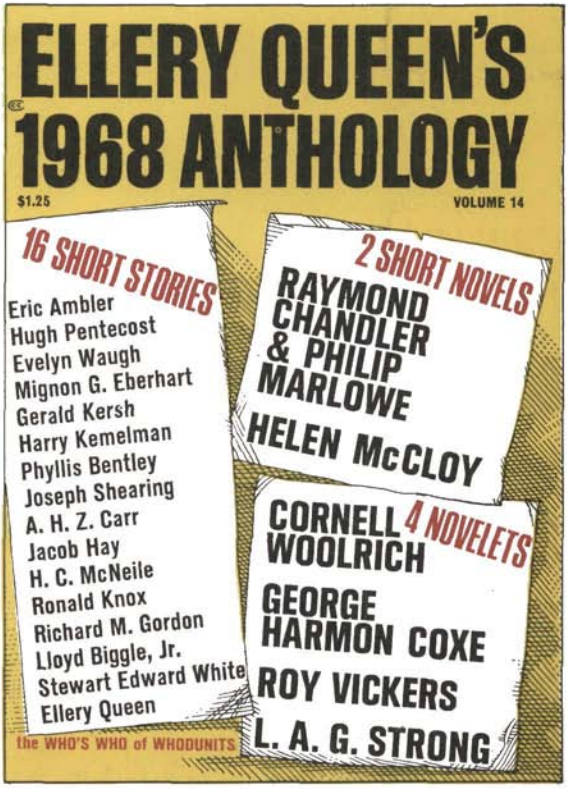

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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

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the *NEWEST* Nicky Welt *novelet by*
HARRY KEMELMAN

As of this issue, EQMM has brought you 313 "first stories," and one of the most memorable, in 26 years of publication, was "The Nine Mile Walk" by Harry Kemelman. "The Nine Mile Walk" not only marked the debut in print of Mr. Kemelman, it also introduced Professor Nicholas (Nicky) Welt, who might be called the modern "Thinking Machine."

No, Mr. Kemelman's "first story" was not forgotten. In 1961, fourteen years after the story first appeared in the April 1947 issue of EQMM, Dr. Jacques Barzun selected "The Nine Mile Walk" for his anthology, THE DELIGHTS OF DETECTION. *Of Mr. Kemelman's first Nicky Welt story, Dr. Barzun wrote: "Nothing less than the play of the detective intelligence upon the physical world will give us a detective tale. It might seem at first sight as if Mr. Kemelman's admirable 'Nine-Mile Walk' destroyed the rule: what is his story but a few words overheard and analyzed? This is mere appearance. The detection is genuinely of the physical conditions surrounding the deed . . . an exemplary work as well as a tour de force."*

Since the appearance of Mr. Kemelman's first story a full 20 years ago, we have published six more short stories about Nicky Welt, and now we offer you the eighth and longest story in the series—a long novelet which will be the keystone of the first book of Nicky Welt stories, THE NINE MILE WALK, *to be published by G. P. Putnam's Sons on October 31, 1967—the day this issue goes off sale.*

Although Mr. Kemelman's career as an author began in EQMM in April 1947, it was not until August 1964 that he emerged as a writer to be reckoned with. His first novel, FRIDAY THE RABBI SLEPT LATE, *featuring Rabbi David Small, was awarded the cherished "Edgar" by MWA (Mystery Writers of America) as the best first mystery novel of 1964. It proved to be an unusual success, both in critical acclaim and in sales, and was a Book-of-the-Month Club alternate selection.*

The second Rabbi Small novel, SATURDAY THE RABBI WENT HUNGRY, *was published in July 1966 and became a spectacular success: it too was a Book-of-the-Month Club alternate selection, was one of "Reader's Digest" Condensed Books, and was on "The New York Times" best-seller list for nine weeks . . .*

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Now, about "Man on a Ladder": every word quoted from Dr. Barzun's comment on "The Nine Mile Walk" applies to this new novelet. A few words overheard and analyzed? Yes—but again much more than that. Like the other Nicky Welt "adventures in deduction," it too is a tour de force; and for a delightful "extra," we suggest that you watch for Mr. Kemelman's brilliant variation of a famous piece of Sherlockismus—it will tickle your 'tec taste-buds!

MAN ON A LADDER

by HARRY KEMELMAN

IN THE PARLANCE OF THE UNDERgraduate, Gentleman Johnny—more respectfully Professor John Baxter Bowman, Chairman of the History Department—was a swinger, with a taste and an interest in clothes not usually associated with the professoriat. Although he lived at Mrs. Hanrahan's, a rooming house largely occupied by impecunious graduate students, his dress for that staid New England community was flamboyant to the point of eccentricity.

He wore a fitted overcoat with an astrakhan collar, lemon-yellow gloves, and was the only man in the university, perhaps in town, who wore a derby. For one who had been so long at the university, surprisingly little was known about his personal life other than that he had been divorced years ago and that he had a son he never talked about.

There was nothing eccentric about Johnny Bowman's scholarship, however. His reputation was solidly based on three learned books published by the university press and on countless papers which had appeared in academic journals. Then quite suddenly he acquired fame far beyond the limits of our town or of the parochial world of scholars. His latest book, *Growth of the Cities*, won the Gardner Prize for Historical Literature which carried a cash award of $500.

But what mattered far more was that, because of the prize, the critics took another look at the book, or rather looked at it for the first time since none of the leading reviewers had bothered with it when it first appeared. They discovered that it was "a work of solid scholarship," "a major contribution to the field," and that Professor John Baxter Bowman was "in the tradition of the great philosopher-historians." Overnight the book began to sell, within a month another printing was necessary, and it even appeared one week on the best-seller lists. It

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goes without saying that at faculty parties, sooner or later the conversation got around to Johnny Bowman's fabulous luck and to envious speculation on the size of his royalties.

I myself barely knew the man. He was rarely at the Faculty Club, and faculty wives had given up inviting him to parties long before I came to the university. And then I left the Law Faculty to run for District Attorney, so I saw even less of him.

Since the President of the university had suggested I take an extended leave of absence instead of resigning, I was still officially a member of the faculty and as such I was invited to the President's annual Christmas reception. I accepted not only because of past favors from Prex, but because I assumed that Professor Bowman would be there and I had a not unnatural desire to renew my acquaintance with a celebrity.

Traditionally, the President's Christmas reception for the faculty is held on the first day of the holiday vacation. Years ago, when travel was less convenient and more expensive, most of the faculty spent the vacation in town. But nowadays the faculty and the student body alike flee from the campus the moment the last class is over, so only a small group turns up at the reception. Nevertheless it is still held on the first day of vacation, rather than a day or two earlier when more faculty members might be able to attend. Tradition dies hard in New England.

I walked over to the reception with my good friend Professor Nicholas Welt. He was planning to catch the night train to Chicago where he would spend the vacation, but as the incumbent of the Snowden Professorship of English Literature, the oldest and perhaps the most prestigious chair in the college, he felt he should put in an appearance at the reception.

We were greeted by Prex and his wife, had dutifully nibbled the spreads and sampled the punch. Finding the last wanting, we began working our way to the door when we were hailed by Jan Ladlo. He entered with his new bride of a few weeks in tow. He introduced me; Nicky already knew her—she was a graduate student and had taken courses with him.

"And how does it feel to be Mrs. Ladlo instead of Mrs. Brewster?" he asked.

"Just fine," she said and put her hand under her husband's arm.

Jan Ladlo is a short pudgy man with a round balding head, a bulbous nose, and protruding myopic eyes. Nevertheless, as an associate professor in the History Department who was still on the right side of forty, he had been considered one of our most eligible bachelors by the faculty wives who are always on the lookout for husbands for their spinster sorority sisters.

"Have you been here long, Profes-

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sor?" Ladlo asked Nicky. "Has Johnny Bowman shown up yet?"

"Apparently not," said Nicky. "I guess you will have to represent the History Department."

I realized that only the older men presumed to call Nicky by his first name, the rest invariably addressed him by title. Not that Nicky is himself old. He is only two or three years older than I, in fact; but he has prematurely white hair—my own is just beginning to gray at the temples—and his gnomelike face is lined.

But that's not it either—Bowman who is several years older than Nicky is called Johnny by the youngest instructors. I suppose it's Nicky's general manner, the way he listens to you when you talk as he might to some luckless freshman asking for an extension on a term paper, that makes you feel young and callow in his presence.

"Oh, he'll probably be along later," said Ladlo. "And Bob Dykes said he was coming, so I guess the History Department will make a pretty good showing before the evening is over."

"I haven't seen Johnny Bowman in months," said Nicky. "How is he these days?"

"I suppose you mean since he's become a celebrity? No different—same old Johnny."

"I heard he was planning to give up teaching," I said, "now that he can live on his royalties."

Ladlo laughed. "He'll never give up teaching. As a matter of fact, his royalties on *Growth of the Cities* won't come to very much—certainly not enough to retire on. It's the next book he expects will make him some money, big money. You see he's known now and the reviewers will be watching for it."

"And how soon will it come out?"

Ladlo shrugged. "You know how secretive Bowman is. Bob Dykes has been helping him on it. He thinks it's still a long way off. Oh, there's Bob now." He waved and called him over. "Where's Laura? Isn't she coming?"

"Oh, she's off to Florida to visit her folks," Dykes said.

"She went alone?" asked Mrs. Ladlo, unable to understand how a wife could leave her husband for even a few days.

"I'm going to try to join her," said Dykes with a grin. "There was some work I was doing for Bowman, and I felt I ought to stay until I finished it."

Dykes is an assistant professor in the History Department, and although not yet thirty, is regarded as a "comer." He is a handsome young man, tall and slim, with an aquiline profile and deep-set eyes. His mop of black hair is curiously bisected by a single lock of white which somehow adds a romantic touch.

Everyone likes Dykes. There is something of the small boy about him that disarms criticism. He is a gadgeteer and a hobbyist with a

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great enthusiasm for anything he happens to be engaged in at the moment—whether it's his ham radio or his photography or his rock hunting. When he talks of them, their potentials seem to expand until you find yourself believing that his interest in ham radio is not just a love of gadgetry but a desire to expand his horizon through enlarged communication; or that his rock collection satisfies not merely his itch for ownership, but gives him a greater understanding of Mother Earth.

And yet his interests had a curious, boyish practicality—he had sold some of his rock specimens to museums and even to our own Geology Department, and as for his camera, he claimed it had helped pay his way through graduate school.

"We were talking about Bowman's new book," I said. "Is it almost finished?"

Dykes smiled. "It could take another year. You know how these things are. I'm planning to spend part of the vacation working on it."

"Not on your house?" asked Ladlo with a twinkle. Everyone twitted Dykes about his latest hobby—his new house. It was an old Victorian ark of a place that he had bought last year, and he never tired of regaling us at the Faculty Club with the wonders of the place—"built to last; not like the shoddy cracker-boxes they're putting up nowadays."

It was spacious and there was room to move around in. And, of course, he had answers to all our objections. It would cost a fortune to heat? He would seal off the rooms not in use. Repairs? He could do most of them himself and enjoy it. He might even consider cutting up the house into small apartments, as his neighbor who had bought its twin across the street was planning to do.

"Well, there are a couple of small jobs around the house I may get around to doing, as relaxation from Bowman's work," he admitted. "Anyone seen him tonight?"

"Just coming in now," said Ladlo, nodding toward the door.

Bowman had a young man with him, a blond good-looking youngster in his twenties, and he steered him in our direction. "I'd like you all to meet my son, Charles," he said somewhat diffidently. "Charles is with a publishing house, an editor. He'll be staying for a week or so and he's offered to take a look at the manuscript." He turned to Dykes. "Isn't that splendid, Bobby?"

Dykes nodded slowly and then grinned. "We can sure use all the help we can get."

We talked for a few minutes, and then Nicky glanced at his watch. "If I'm going to catch my train, I'd better get started. It's a longish walk to the station."

"Taking the eight o'clock?" asked Dykes. "I've got my car here. I'll drive you over."

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"Very kind of you," said Nicky gruffly.

As we started for the door, Bowman asked, "You coming back, Bobby?"

"I don't think so. I left Duke in the car. I ought to take him home."

"Will you be home tomorrow?"

"I guess so."

"Good, then we'll drop in on you."

We got our coats and went out into the street. "Lot's been happening in your department," I remarked. "Bowman getting out a best-seller, Ladlo getting married—"

"And she's a nice girl, too," Dykes interjected quickly.

"Appears to be."

"Some of the wives of my colleagues haven't been over kind."

"Oh?"

"You know how it is here. They were seen together while she was still a married woman. She was getting a divorce, of course, but they didn't know that. And then when the divorce came through and they got married, there were some who thought she ought not remarry so soon, as though she'd just been widowed."

As we neared the car, a dog began to bark vehemently. Dykes smiled fondly. "That's Duke. He knows my step."

He had acquired the dog shortly after moving into the new house, ostensibly to provide protection and companionship for Laura when she was alone. But it was obvious to anyone who knew Dykes that he had bought Duke because, like any boy, he wanted a dog. He had spent hours in training him—the usual tricks: to heel, to come on call; and for the last he used one of those silent whistles which he wore on a cord around his neck.

Duke was no ordinary dog. He was a Briard, a Belgian sheepdog, a huge creature with a long rough iron-gray coat, the shaggy fur covering even his face so that you wondered how he could see. I remember when someone observed that it must cost a small fortune to feed the beast, Dykes replied that although the dog did indeed eat a lot, he was thinking of getting a female and breeding her and then selling the puppies. It had struck me as a perfect Dykesian solution to the problem.

Without question the dog was well trained. After expressing its obvious joy at seeing his master, he sat sedately beside Dykes and Nicky and I got in back. As we drove, Dykes kept turning around, much to Nicky's annoyance, to tell us examples of the dog's intelligence, and we were relieved to arrive at the station without mishap.

We saw Nicky off and then Dykes asked if I'd like to stop for a minute and see his place. But I begged off.

"Some other time. I really want to get home now."

"Okay, some other time it is." He seemed hurt by my refusal.

We drove in silence until we

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reached my door. I thanked him for the lift and remarked that it seemed a shame he had to stay in town during the vacation, what with his wife away and all. "Is the book that far along that these few days will make a difference?"

He shook his head. "We're a long way from finishing, but Johnny was insistent. Maybe he's right because he's got plenty of trouble on this one."

Whatever trouble Johnny Bowman might have had with the book was over. In fact, all his troubles were over. Johnny Bowman was dead.

His death seemingly was the result of idle curiosity. The university was excavating the foundation of a new graduate-school dormitory. At the crest of High Street the excavation came to within a few feet of the roadbed and the police had set up lanterns and a roadblock there.

Obviously Bowman must have gone beyond to peer over the edge at the progress of the work. We had had our first snowfall of the winter that morning, and although it was a light snow, less than an inch, the ground was slick. The drop at that point was at least thirty feet, and either he had slipped, or the ground at the edge had given way. He had fallen to his death.

Since it was Saturday, there was no one working on the site, and for that matter, with vacation, no one was around. A college town becomes a ghost town during the Christmas vacation. The workman who filled and lit the lanterns found him crumpled at the foot of the drop, his derby a few yards away. The body showed the expected contusions, and the medical examiner gave it as his opinion that he had died within minutes of striking the bottom.

Of course the police held an investigation since the death was not due to natural causes. And as D.A., and because of my connection with the university, I felt I ought to take part in it.

I questioned Mrs. Hanrahan, Bowman's landlady, but learned only that he had slept late that Saturday morning and would not have left until sometime around noon. He had stopped at the history office. Professor Ladlo was there, but he had little to offer.

"I must have been the last person to see him alive," he remarked. "Johnny came in around half-past twelve, and we chatted for a few minutes. Then he left saying that he was going to drop in on Bob Dykes, but I've seen Dykes and he said he was in Norton Saturday afternoon."

"Had he expected to find Dykes here at the history office? Is that why he came?"

Ladlo shook his head. "I don't think so. When they work together, it's mostly at Dykes's house. No, I guess he came here as a matter of habit—he gets his mail here for one

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thing. Besides, if he were going to Dykes's place, this is on the way."

I questioned Dykes who confirmed that he had not seen Bowman. "I didn't really have an appointment with him," he said. "You heard him. I said I'd be home and he said he might drop around. It was that kind of thing, nothing definite. We've been working here because there's plenty of space and we're not likely to be interrupted, and I have the manuscript and all the notes. Normally, I would have hung around all day—Lord knows I've got plenty to do here. But with Laura gone, I felt kind of restless and I decided to go into Norton to do some shopping.

"I guess I assumed that Johnny would be spending his time with his son. I left here around eleven and when I got to Norton, I just wandered around the stores. I had a bite and then decided, as long as I was there, to really make a day of it, so I went to a movie—right in the middle of the day," he added wonderingly. "First time I've ever done that sort of thing—go to a movie in the daytime, I mean. And just think, the first time I do something out of the ordinary it results in the death of Johnny Bowman."

"Results? How so?"

"Well, it stands to reason if I had been at home, we would have worked on the book and I would have driven him home."

"How do you know he ever got to your house?"

"Well, of course I don't. I just assumed it. Do you have any evidence that he didn't?"

I shook my head, but because he was obviously distressed and I wanted to relieve his mind, I said, "It's just more likely that it happened on the way to your house rather than on the way back. The slope to the top of High Street from the history office is a good climb, and I myself usually stop a minute to rest before I go on. I'm just guessing, of course, but I think that when Johnny got to the top of the hill, he stopped, and then quite naturally he walked over to see how the excavation was coming along."

I could see that he was grateful for my theory. He nodded his head slowly and thoughtfully. "As a matter of fact, I do the same sort of thing. I don't feel winded when I get to the top—" he grinned at me—"I guess I'm in a little better condition. But I always stop to look at the view. You can see over the whole valley, and I can even see the roof of my house from there."

My visit to the son was more in the nature of a condolence call. But he seemed to take his father's death rather lightly, and I was shocked. I could not refrain from remarking on it.

"What do you expect?" he demanded bitterly. "I knew him about as well as I know you. Since I was thirteen when my parents were divorced, and that's twelve years ago, I've seen my father maybe half a

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dozen times. I'd get a letter perhaps three or four times a year, and that was all."

"Sometimes," I suggested, "it's not easy for the parent who doesn't have custody to see the children. He may feel that they are resentful and that he is hurting them more by seeing them than by staying away."

"He had visitation rights. He simply never exercised them."

"Then what brought you down at this time? A sudden burst of filial affection?"

"Business—strictly business. My boss found out that my father had no contract yet for his new book, so he suggested that maybe I could get it for the firm. I thought it might do me some good with them, so I came down."

"Did you tell your father that was why you wanted to see him?"

He had the grace to blush. "No, I just wrote him that I had a week's vacation and would like to see him if he were free."

"And did you get the book for the firm?"

"I didn't broach the subject. I thought I'd play it cool. I just said I'd like to see what he was working on and maybe I could give him some editorial assistance."

I asked if he had seen the manuscript, but he shook his head.

"He said he would see me in the afternoon. We were to have dinner together. I assumed he was planning to bring the manuscript with him. I waited around all day, and when he didn't show I called his rooming house. They said he had left around noon and hadn't returned. I assumed he had forgotten about me. I guess I was annoyed. It was in keeping with the way he had treated me all my life.

"So I left the hotel and walked around town until I got hungry and —oh, yes, I called the hotel once to see if there was any message, and of course there wasn't. So I ate at a restaurant alone. Then I picked up a magazine and came back here to the hotel and read and watched TV for the rest of the evening."

Our local paper gave the story the full treatment as was fitting with such an important figure in the community. There was a full biography along with quotes from famous people about his book; there was a long statement from the police, a statement from me that included my theory of the time of death, the statements of Mrs. Hanrahan and Professors Ladlo and Dykes together with a picture of each, and finally an editorial gently chiding the police for inadequately safeguarding the dangerous site.

Professor Bowman was buried the day after Christmas. There was a small turnout. Johnny's son was present, of course; he stood bareheaded, his hands clasped behind him, his handsome face impassive. He left immediately after the service.

The next day Nicky Welt returned from Chicago. He had

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known Bowman for a long time and been friendly with him, so it was only natural that he should want to talk about him.

I told him all the circumstances of Bowman's death and the results of our investigation in detail. At the end he pursed his lips and remarked, "It's very curious."

"What's curious?"

"Johnny must have been at least sixty—"

"Sixty-one according to his son."

"Very well, sixty-one. A man who has lived that long has usually learned to avoid the more obvious dangers."

"So?"

"So it's curious that he'd go so close to the edge of an excavation that he'd tumble in."

"It happens all the time. And remember there was some snow and the ground was slippery."

"Yes, I suppose so."

The college flag remained at half mast for a week, and then everyone returned from their vacation, and it was as though Johnny Bowman had never been. It was a phenomenon I had observed before.

Even Dykes who had been closest to him rarely mentioned him. As a matter of fact, he had a brand-new interest. He was on the Executive Committee of the Faculty Club and was in charge of running the annual faculty chess tournament. Since he was one of the best players in the club with an excellent chance of becoming champion, small wonder that he went about his task with enthusiasm.

Nicky and I had just finished lunching at the club when we came upon him tacking up the results of the draw on the bulletin board. Seeing Nicky, he said, "Hello—we're matched in the first round."

"So we are," said Nicky. "I'm free at the moment if you'd care to play and get it over with."

"I've got all afternoon," said Dykes, "but Laura may phone and I ought to be home to receive her call. She's still in Florida, you know." His face brightened. "Unless you'd care to come over to my place and play there. I've got a board and tournament chessmen. And I'd like you to see my house," he added.

Nicky gave me a questioning glance and I shrugged. "Very well, I could use a good walk."

As we left the club, Dykes turned to Nicky and said, "We go up High Street. It's a bit of a climb."

"My office is in Lever Hall, young man," said Nicky with some asperity, "and I make it by way of High Street every day."

"Oh, sure." Dykes was apologetic. "I just thought—after lunch and all."

The wind whistled down the street and we had to lean forward against it. Dykes strode along on his long legs and Nicky and I strove to keep up with him. A couple of times I thought Nicky would have liked

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to stop to catch his breath—I know I would have—but it was a point of pride with him never to show weakness, so we continued without stop until we reached the crest of the hill. There Dykes paused.

"My place is over there. You can just see the roof from here."

"Why, it's not far at all," I said.

"About a hundred yards as the crow flies," he said, "but unfortunately it's a lot farther by foot."

Nicky nodded and then walked over to the other side of the road. "And this is where poor Bowman fell, eh?"

Since the accident, the police had put up a sturdy barrier of chain-link fencing which made it impossible to reach to the edge.

"If they had a fence like that up, Bowman would have been alive today," remarked Dykes.

From there on it was downhill and the going was much easier. The street on which Dykes lived was a short private one with just his house and another facing it that might have been its twin. They were both Victorian houses with numerous turrets and gables and tiny porches that served no really useful purpose.

Dykes stood back in obvious admiration. "What do you think of it? Of course it needs a lot of work, and I'll be busy with putty and paint for most of the summer, I guess, but I feel I've got something here to work on."

He led us up the steps to the front door. He unlocked it and proudly called our attention to its width. "Look at that—almost three inches thick. And that lock and door handle—and this knocker. Solid brass all of it and heavy. I'll bet you couldn't replace this knocker alone for fifty dollars."

The door opened on a small vestibule beyond which was a square reception hall, unfurnished except for a coatrack. Dykes snapped on a light and we could see a large room on either side, and like the reception hall, sparsely furnished.

From below came the sound of a dog barking and a moment later we heard him scratching on a door in the rear of the house, demanding to be let out.

Dykes smiled. "Good old Duke."

"Aren't you going to let him out?" I asked.

"He's better off down there," he said. Then in a tone of sharp command, "Down, Duke, down. Quiet." The barking and scratching stopped immediately and we heard the dog trot down the stairs. Dykes listened to Duke's retreating footsteps and grinned smugly at the dog's training and obedience.

He led us to a broad staircase and as we started upstairs said, "Take a look at that balustrade, will you? Solid mahogany." He rapped a baluster with his knuckles.

He then led us into a room on the second floor that evidently served as the living room. There were several armchairs, a coffee table, and a rug —probably the furnishings of the

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Dykeses' former apartment, but now quite lost in this new spaciousness. Over near the window, in an alcove, was a small table with a chessboard and a box of chessmen. Two bridge chairs were drawn up to it; Dykes left the room and quickly returned with a third.

Dykes drew white and won the first game in little more than twenty moves. As they turned the board around for the second game—the rules called for the best two out of three—Dykes said, "I guess that gambit was a little strange to you."

It was certainly strange to me. He had opened by advancing the king's rook pawn to the fourth space (P-KR4). It was probably the worst opening move on the board and one which I could not recall having seen used except by the rankest beginner. It was as though he were deliberately handicapping himself to make up for having the advantage of drawing white, or perhaps he was showing a kind of courtesy to his older opponent who was also a guest in his house.

Then it occurred to me that by throwing away his first move, he may have wanted to show how lightly he held Nicky. But as the game had progressed, the initial move somehow became the focus for a strong attack on Nicky's king after he had castled. And then quite suddenly, the attack turned out to be a mere diversion and Dykes captured the queen. Nicky had no choice but to resign.

He grunted in acknowledgement of defeat and put down his king. Nicky is not a good loser. They had not played more than half a dozen moves of the second game when we heard a bell ring somewhere toward the back of the house.

"Is that the call you were expecting?" I asked.

"No, that's the doorbell." Dykes left the room and we could hear him shout down the stairwell, "Come on up."

He escorted into the room a young man of his own age with reddish-brown hair and a white, freckled face with sharp, knowing features. The visitor was dressed in a leather windbreaker with a fur collar. A small foreign camera with a large protruding lens dangled from his neck by a leather strap. Dykes introduced him as his friend, Bud Lesser.

Dykes did not offer to get him a chair and Lesser did not seem to expect one. He stood there, one hand resting on the back of Dykes's chair, his eyes flicking from the board to the faces of the players.

"Do you play, Mr. Lesser?" I asked out of politeness.

"Some."

"He beats me more often than I beat him," said Dykes. He made his move, then leaned back lazily and said, "How do you like my camera, Bud?"

His friend shrugged and smiled. "I don't know. Haven't had time to do a full roll yet. I'll know better

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when I develop what I've got in here."

Nicky, who was in the throes of deciding on his next move, glared at the two, and Dykes immediately turned his attention back to the board. I, too, concentrated on the board. It seemed to me tht Nicky had a slight advantage. He made his move and we all relaxed a little.

"I've got a Schlossmann antenna you can use for your ham radio—if you're interested," Lesser volunteered.

"Oh, yeah? When did you get it?"

"It's the one I got for myself, but I decided not to use it. My place is too low. I bought two and installed one for Arnold Sterling across the way. He tells me it works fine."

Dykes glanced at the board and negligently pushed a pawn. "I didn't know he had one. When did you put it up?"

"You can see it from here," said Lesser, nodding toward the window. Dykes left the chess table and went to the window to look out. "He wanted it for Christmas, so the day before, I came down at noon and by two o'clock I had it up."

Dykes returned to his seat. "If I had seen you, I would have given you a hand."

"I saw you," said Lesser.

"You couldn't have—I was away all day." He nodded as Nicky made his move and then he made his own immediately after. The game had reached a critical point and Nicky's brow was furrowed as he concentrated on the position. Dykes, too, was hunched as he studied the board.

As Nicky reached forward to move his piece there was a flash of light and the snick of a camera shutter. Nicky looked up indignantly.

Lesser grinned. "Sorry, I just couldn't resist that shot—the afternoon sun slicing in through the slats of those venetian blinds on you, Bob, like you were dressed in prison stripes."

"Bud has a great eye for trick camera shots," Dykes offered by way of apology for his friend. He concentrated on the board for a minute; then, smiling, he made his move and favored me with a wink. The advantage was clearly with him now. He was completely relaxed as he said to Lesser, "What are you asking for the antenna?"

"Five hundred."

Dykes whistled and shook his head. "I couldn't manage that much."

"I'll take three hundred and your camera."

Nicky moved and Dykes turned his attention once more to the board. He had a clear win now and his next move seemed obvious, but he took a long time thinking about it. Finally he made the expected move and turned once again to Lesser.

"Installed?" he asked.

Lesser hesitated.

"I'd want it right above the dormer window in back," said Dykes.

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"Fine with me. I'll put it any place you like."

"It's pretty high—up on one of the gables. Will you need any help?"

"No, I can put it up myself—I've got a magnesium ladder and it's no trouble."

"Okay, when we finish here I'll show you just where I want it."

The game did not last much longer. Another half dozen moves and again Nicky put down his king in acknowledgment of defeat. We followed Dykes downstairs, and then because he seemed to expect it and because by now we were somewhat curious, we followed him to the yard in back of the house.

Dykes pointed up at the roof. "There," he said. "Can you put it up right there?"

Lesser looked up. "Sure. I can rest my ladder right here in front of the cellar bulkhead doors."

"See that molding on the corner? Can you attach it to that?"

"Sure, no sweat. I'll use an angle bracket. Tomorrow be all right? Around noon?"

"Fine."

Lesser left us and Dykes finished showing us around. "What do you think of it?" he asked eagerly. "Do you see what I mean when I say it's solid and built to last?"

Nicky pointed out the cellar bulkhead doors where Lesser proposed to set his ladder. "I noticed you've had to do some modernizing," he remarked wryly. "Those doors don't look very solid."

Dykes grinned. "I guess there are some things you can't have too solid. The original bulkhead doors weighed a ton and they were pretty far gone. I could have patched them, but you know bulkhead doors don't swing on a hinge. You've got to lift them. Laura couldn't manage those heavy doors in taking her wash from the cellar out to the yard, so I installed these aluminum ones. A child can lift these."

On the way back I was tempted to tease Nicky about the quality of his chess. "You were not doing too badly in that second game," I said. "For a while I thought you might even pull out a win."

Absent-mindedly he agreed. "He does play well, doesn't he? All slapdash and daring and full of surprises." Then he smiled and added, "But I was so absorbed in the conversation between Dykes and his friend that, frankly, I lost interest in the game."

Nicky always offers excuses for losing at chess.

The next day Nicky and I had just finished lunch at the Faculty Club and were heading back to his office when Dykes joined us and said, "Say, if you fellows are going up High Street, I'll come along if you don't mind."

I am not at all sure that Nicky didn't mind—the chess defeat still rankled—but of course he could not very well refuse. As we walked along, Dykes explained that Lesser

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was going to put up the new antenna and he felt he ought to give him a hand.

When we came to the top of the hill, Dykes pointed. "Why, there he is now."

We followed the direction of his finger and could see in the distance a tiny figure on a ladder, working away at the edge of the roof. We watched for a moment and then started off. Dykes, who had stopped to tie his shoelace, hurried to catch up and we went on together to Nicky's office.

We stood on the sidewalk talking for a few minutes. Then just as Nicky was about to leave us, Dykes exclaimed, "Why, here comes Duke." He squatted down on his haunches and called, "Here, boy."

The dog seemed to increase his speed as he sighted his master and came bounding up, dancing around Dykes until his master ordered him sharply, "Down, Duke. Sit." The dog obeyed immediately and sat motionless, a mound of iron-gray fur, except for the ridiculous red flannel tongue which vibrated ecstatically. From deep in his throat came urgent whiny sounds.

"It's just as if he's trying to tell me something, isn't it?" Dykes remarked. "All right, boy, come on." He waved farewell to us and walked off down the road, the dog pacing sedately by his side.

"Smart dog," I remarked.

"Well trained," Nicky amended.

I thought I detected in his curt reply that his defeat of yesterday still irritated him. "Well, there's no doubt that the master is plenty smart," I said maliciously.

He did not deign to answer, but turned on his heel and mounted the stairs. I chuckled at the thought that I had reached him—it didn't happen often.

Nothing at my office demanded my attention, so I strolled back by way of the campus where I bumped into Professor Zelsky with whom I had been matched for the first round of the tournament. He was also free, so we returned to the Faculty Club and played our match which I won handily in two straight games. It gave me considerable satisfaction to know that I had at least made the second round while Nicky had been eliminated in the first.

I played another few games with Zelsky, losing when I gave him an advantage, but invariably winning when we played even. He invited me to dinner at his house and it was quite late when I finally got home.

The next morning I turned on the news broadcast while dressing and heard that Lesser had been killed by a fall from a ladder while working at Dykes's house.

I had only met Lesser once—two days before—and had not found him particularly prepossessing; nevertheless it was something of a shock to realize he was now dead. What made it even worse was that apparently I had seen him only minutes before his death.

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I arrived at my office and to my surprise found Nicky waiting. He had the morning newspaper with him and it was folded to one of the inside pages. He tossed it on my desk and tapped it with a long forefinger. "Have you seen this?" he asked.

A glance at the headline told me it was the story on Lesser. "I heard it over the radio this morning," I said.

"I thought you might have more information."

I riffled through the papers on my desk. "Nothing here. But we can step around the corner to Police Headquarters and see what they've got." I wondered a little why he was so interested, but knowing how I felt I assumed he felt the same way.

Captain Scalise was busy checking through the contents of a metal file on his desk when we came in. "This is luck," he said. "I was just planning to drop around to see you."

"Oh?"

"A man, name of Lesser—"

"That's why we're here," I said.

"Then you heard about it?"

"On the morning newscast. It didn't say much. Was there some reason you thought his death might interest me?"

"Well, there is and there isn't," said Scalise. "Seems this Lesser had a little shop where he repaired radios and TVs. He also did some film developing and printing. And he traded in cameras and sold supplies to ham operators. The story as I get it was that he was putting up some special kind of antenna for Professor Dykes. I guess you two must know him."

Nicky and I nodded.

"Well, along about half-past one another professor from the college, name of Jan Ladlo, comes calling on Dykes. He rings the bell and there's no answer. So he goes around the back. According to him, Dykes frequently works around the back of the house and doesn't always hear the bell. At least that's what he says." He looked at us questioningly.

"Go on."

"Well, his story is that just as he rounded the corner of the house he heard a cry, and looking up, he saw the ladder falling. A moment later Lesser hit the ground. He rushed over, but he saw immediately that there was nothing to do. Ladlo ran out into the street and caught hold of Jeb Grogan who is the patrolman on the beat. According to Grogan, Lesser was already dead, but of course he called in for an ambulance."

Scalise opened a desk drawer and took out a large manila envelope. He slid the contents onto the top of the desk. "This is what was found on him."

It was about what you would expect—a well-worn wallet containing eight dollars in bills, a pocket handkerchief, seventy-three cents in coin, and a leather key case. The captain

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poked in the still open drawer and this time drew out a camera with a leather case and strap. "And he was wearing this at the time. Kind of funny—I mean a man wearing a camera while working on a ladder."

"He was testing it—the camera, I mean. I gather he carried one pretty much all the time."

"Testing it to decide whether to buy it or not?"

"That's right."

"Then that checks. This fellow Dykes called up and asked if he could have it—claimed it was his camera and that you knew about it."

"Is that why you wanted to see me?"

"That was one of the reasons."

"What time did this happen—I mean, Lesser falling?" asked Nicky.

Scalise flipped the pages of a notebook. "It was 1:52 when Grogan saw the body. Figure that Lesser fell a couple of minutes earlier, maybe as much as five minutes because this Ladlo didn't find Grogan right away."

I looked at Nicky. "That must have been within minutes after we saw him from High Street."

Nicky nodded grimly.

Scalise picked up the key case. "This kind of roused my curiosity," he said.

I opened it and disclosed three keys, one of them obviously the key to the dead man's car. "What makes these so interesting?"

"Well, I know Lesser's shop," said Scalise. "It's a little two-by-four place and he lives in the back. I wouldn't give you a hundred dollars for everything in it. Now this key is the key to the shop, but *this* one is to a safe-deposit box down at the bank. I know because I've got one. So I decided to take a look at the contents of that box. I also had the boys in the squad car look over his place. They brought this file in. It has some papers—mostly bills and invoices and business correspondence. Nothing that helps us. There are also a bunch of pictures—"

"Pictures that Lesser snapped?" asked Nicky. "May I?"

"Sure." Scalise pushed the file over to him.

"Did the bank manager let you open Lesser's box?" I asked.

"Oh, I went to see Judge Quigley first, of course."

"These pictures are extremely interesting," said Nicky.

"Interesting how?" asked Scalise suspiciously, fearful he had overlooked something.

"They're all the same kind of thing—what the art critics call *coup d'oeil*, the blink-of-an-eye type of picture, a flash of visual impression that is almost deceptive. There are action pictures—for example, of a basketball game in which the players are like figures in a ballet; a picture of a full moon transfixed on the spire of a steeple like a ball on a Christmas tree; a picture of two people on a park bench that looks like a single body with two heads."

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Scalise laughed. "Well, he took one other picture that isn't in that collection. It's like the blink of an eye, all right. In fact, it will make you blink. I found it in the safe-deposit box—that's all there was in it."

He reached into his desk drawer and tossed over to me a small square print. It was of Professor Ladlo and his young wife. They were stark naked.

"A Peeping Tom," I exclaimed.

"Worse than that," said Scalise. "Turn it over."

On the back, in pencil, was a list of dates and beside each a sum of money.

"You'll notice that starting in May and going through December, there is a hundred dollars a month that I'm guessing Ladlo paid to Lesser."

"Blackmail?"

"I would say so."

"They've only been married a few weeks—"

"Oh, that's his wife, is it?"

"But the dates and figures would suggest that this happened some time ago, months ago." I chuckled. "Sonofagun, I didn't think Ladlo had it in him."

Nicky cocked a quizzical eyebrow at me. "The initiative could have come from the lady, you know. She has a forceful personality."

"Nicky!"

"Obviously he was on a ladder when he took the shot," he continued, ignoring my outburst.

"How do you know?" asked Scalise.

"Because that took place in Ladlo's apartment. I've been there and I recognize the unusual lamp on the table. Now Ladlo is on the third floor of that new apartment house on Dalton Street. Since there are only one- and two-story houses across the street, he wouldn't have to draw the blinds. You can't see into his apartment from any of the houses across the way. But a man on a ladder putting up an antenna on the roof of one of those houses would be on the third-story level and could see straight in."

"I guess you're right," said Scalise. "That must have been the way it was done. In any case, you can see that I was justified in calling in Ladlo to make a statement."

"You showed him the snapshot?" I asked.

"No, I thought I ought to speak to you about it first, him being a professor at the college and all that. But knowing about the print, I thought it gave me the right to ask questions and get a full statement."

"What sort of questions?"

"The sort of questions you'd ask if you were investigating a crime," he answered sharply, "rather than what you'd need to just fill out an accident report. I asked him why he was calling on Dykes in the first place. You see, if he said he just happened to be in the neighborhood, he could have just happened to see Lesser on top of that ladder. A

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man on a ladder, Professor," he added with a smile, "can not only see a great distance, but he can also be seen."

"Your idea is that Ladlo might have spotted Lesser on the ladder, approached unnoticed, and upset the ladder?" asked Nicky.

"Why not?"

"It was a magnesium ladder and they're pretty easy to upset," Nicky admitted.

"That's right," said Scalise approvingly.

"And what reason *did* Ladlo give for being there?" I asked.

"He said he went to see Dykes about some manuscript that Dykes was working on. You remember this Professor Bowman who took a tumble a couple of weeks ago up at the excavation on High Street? He was writing a book with this Dykes, or Dykes was helping him. Now Bowman's son"—he glanced at his notes—"that would be Charles Bowman, he's in the publishing business, and he's interested in getting that book for his own company. And as the old man's heir, I guess he's got a right to it—at least to that part of it that his father wrote. But according to Ladlo, the son was afraid that if he came right out and asked for it, Dykes might balk—try to palm him off with a couple of chapters, claim that the rest was his, or that it was all that had been done. Then a little later, Dykes could bring the book out as his own. So the son asked Ladlo to see Dykes and maybe evaluate the manuscript."

"But why Ladlo? Did the son know him?"

"He met him at Prex's party, of course," Nicky observed. "It would be the natural thing to do—to approach the senior man in the department."

"I gather, too, the young feller hinted that he might let him finish it, either with Dykes or alone," said Scalise.

"And did young Bowman come to see him? He was still in town?" I asked.

"That's what Ladlo said."

"Did you check?"

"I called the hotel and he had been there all right, but had already left by the time I called. Anyway, that was Ladlo's reason for going to see Dykes. And by the way, that's why he didn't phone first to make an appointment. I got the impression that Ladlo thought Dykes might not be too willing to show the manuscript. His idea was to drop in on Dykes accidentally—as though he just happened to be in the neighborhood and then lead the talk around to the manuscript."

I glanced at Nicky. "What do you think?"

"I think the manuscript might be valuable enough to murder for," said Nicky quietly. "And I think there might be proof in that camera, Captain. I suggest you have the film in it processed immediately."

"You think Lesser might have

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had a chance to snap a picture of Ladlo just before he fell, maybe even caught him in the act of tipping the ladder?" He looked at Nicky in frank admiration, then flipped the intercom switch on his desk and called in, "Tom, take this down to Ned at the photo lab and tell him I want the roll in it developed and printed right away."

"But it wasn't Ladlo who wanted the manuscript," I protested, "at least not for himself. It was young Bowman—"

"We've got only Ladlo's word for that," said Scalise. "Besides, Ladlo had reason for killing Lesser because he was blackmiling him."

"He *had* been," Nicky corrected. "That was over and done with—the figures and dates show that. There's a line under the December payment and the amount is totaled. Back in May or earlier, when the picture was taken, it could have done a lot of damage. The lady was suing for divorce at the time. But now that they're married, Ladlo had nothing to fear from him."

Scalise was nettled. "Yeah, but Ladlo paid eight hundred dollars in this little game of Lesser's, and as far as I'm concerned, that's good enough reason for Ladlo to give him the old heave-ho when he saw his chance."

Nicky looked at him in surprise. "Do you really think so, Captain? Eight hundred dollars is a tidy sum, but to a man in Ladlo's position, hardly ruinous. Jan Ladlo is a mild, gentle, scholarly type, not the type I would call vengeful. It's hard for me to imagine him killing someone in cold blood because he had been blackmailed out of eight hundred dollars. And would he have gone looking for a policeman? When he could have walked quietly away?"

Nicky shook his head. "I doubt if he ever even knew who his blackmailer was. I doubt if Lesser would have approached him directly. My guess is that the arrangements were made by telephone and the money was sent to a box number at the post office. When Lesser saw the announcement of the marriage a few weeks ago, he knew the game was up. It wouldn't surprise me if he sent him the negative as a wedding gift. That would explain why it wasn't in the safe-deposit box with the print."

Suddenly Nickey began to laugh. "Yes, I'm sure of it. It's in keeping with Lesser's rather peculiar sense of humor."

"What do you know about Lesser and his sense of humor?" I asked scornfully. "You saw him for less than a minute yesterday, a hundred yards away. And the day before, you saw him for about ten minutes, and he spoke maybe a hundred words."

"The conversation wasn't long," Nicky admitted, "nevertheless it was quite remarkable."

"What was remarkable about it?"

"Do you remember how it went?"

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I flatter myself that as a result of years of courtroom experience in the examination of witnesses I have developed a pretty good memory for that sort of thing. "Not word for word," I said, "but I remember the gist of it. Dykes asked Lesser how he liked the camera and Lesser answered that he didn't know yet because he was still testing it. Then Lesser asked Dykes if he wanted to buy some special antenna that he had. Dykes asked him when he got it and Lesser said it was one that he had bought for himself but had decided not to use because his place was too low; that he had put one up on the house across the street and that it worked fine. All right so far?"

"You're doing fine."

"Okay. Then Dykes asked him when he had put it up and Lesser said he had installed it in time for Christmas. And Dykes said he would have helped him if he had seen him working. And Lesser answered that he had seen Dykes. So Dykes said he couldn't have because he had been away all day."

"And what did Lesser say to that?"

"He didn't say anything."

"That was what was remarkable about the conversation."

"I don't get it."

"Of course you don't." Now Nicky was scornful. "It's your courtroom training. In the courtroom, dialogue is carried on according to a rigid set of rules: a question is asked and the question is answered—*finis*. If you should repeat the question, the attorney on the other side or the judge would object that you had already asked your question and received an answer. Then there would be a discussion and finally the judge would rule that the witness did have to answer or did not. Then the witness would ask to have the question repeated—and on and on.

"But normal conversation doesn't work that way. It has a certain rhythm. When Dykes said that Lesser couldn't have seen him on the day in question because he was out of town, Lesser should have said something like, 'Well, I thought it was you,' or 'I could have sworn it was you,' or even, 'I guess I must have been mistaken.' But Lesser said nothing, and I lost all interest in the chess game because I was waiting for the other shoe to drop."

"But still I don't see—"

"What connection it has with the present case? You've forgotten the day they were talking about. Lesser put up the antenna on the day before Christmas. That was the day Johnny Bowman fell to his death and Dykes claimed not to have seen him because he had been out of town all day."

I stared at him. "Are you suggesting that Bobby Dykes had something to do with Bowman's death?"

"He said he wasn't home when Bowman called because he was out of town. If he lied about seeing

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Bowman, it could be only because he had some knowledge of his death. And if he claimed he was in Norton all day, it can mean only that he wanted to furnish himself with an alibi."

"But you don't *know* that he was home. Lesser said he saw him and Dykes denied it. And Lesser did not contradict him. And now Lesser is dead and we can't ask him."

"Ah, but he did contradict him. He dropped the other shoe all right, but I didn't know it at the time. Only when I saw this snapshot of Ladlo and his wife did I understand. He answered Dykes by snapping a picture of him and then explained that he couldn't resist the shot, what with the sun slanting through the venetian blinds like prison stripes. In effect, he was saying that he had *proof* of having seen him—that he had a picture of him. Dykes understood because it was then that he asked how much he wanted for the antenna. And if Dykes had any doubt, it was dispelled when Lesser quoted him a price of five hundred dollars."

"You mean that five hundred was a blackmail payment? How do you know? What do you know about the price of an antenna?"

"I'll admit I don't know much about—antennæ? antennas?" He cocked his head to one side to listen to the sound of the two words. Then he nodded, "Antennas—I think I prefer the English plural; the Latin can be reserved for insects."

"Nicky!"

"Oh, yes, well I don't know much about antennas, but I do know something about five hundred dollars. I saw the antenna that Lesser installed on the house across the street which was the same as the one he was putting up on Dykes's house, and unless it is made of some precious metal instead of the steel it appears to be made of, I would say that five hundred was at least three or four hundred too much."

"But why would Dykes want to kill Bowman, and how would he go about doing it?"

"As to why, obviously to get control of Bowman's manuscript. It's expected to make a lot of money—"

"You mean he'll publish it as his own work?"

"Oh, hardly. He couldn't, and it would do him little good if he did since Bowman's name on the cover is what will sell it. But as matters stand now, no one knows how much of it has actually been done. He can easily claim that less than half is finished. He will complete it and thus become a co-author rather than a mere research assistant. His name will be on the cover with Bowman's. He will receive at least half the royalties. And the boost to his academic prestige will be enormous."

"I'll grant you that."

"As to how he did it," Nicky went on, "that presents no difficulties. He and Bowman were on High Street —perhaps on their way to meet

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young Bowman. At the top of the hill they stopped to rest and Dykes could have called Johnny over to look at the excavation. And when Bowman leaned over the edge—" Nicky shrugged.

"You mean he thought of it just like that, on the spur of the moment?" asked Scalise.

"Oh, he's a quick thinker, is our Professor Dykes. You've only to play chess with him to realize that. One glance at the board and he makes his move. But I'm inclined to believe that he had been thinking of this for some time. I have an idea his wife sensed something—I find it suggestive that she went to visit her folks without him and still has not returned. One thing I'm sure of: Bowman never would have asked him to remain and work on the book while his wife went on vacation alone. Gentleman Johnny was a gentleman."

Nicky cocked a speculative eye at the ceiling. "I wonder what Dykes would have managed if young Bowman hadn't come—"

"Young Bowman? What did he have to do with it?" asked Scalise quickly.

"His coming forced Dykes's hand, of course. Once they went over the manuscript with Johnny's son, Dykes would have been stopped from claiming a major share in its authorship."

"Well, it's an interesting case you've made out, Professor," said Scalise grudgingly, "but I don't see that it does us much good. You'd never get a jury to convict on that kind of evidence. Dykes has only to deny everything, and with Lesser dead, there's no way of proving it."

"You're forgetting the picture that Lesser took," said Nicky.

As if on cue, there was a knock on the door. "Got the pictures for you, Captain," the clerk said.

The film had rolled up into a tight cylinder from the drying process, and we crowded around Scalise as he weighted one end down with a heavy ruler and unrolled it slowly, studying each frame as he did so. Not till the end of the strip did Nicky point triumphantly and exclaim, "There it is."

The captain and I stared at the frame and then looked at each other, unbelieving. It was indeed a picture of two men—but so foreshortened that at first sight they looked more like short cylindrical stumps surmounted by round buttons which were their heads.

I began to laugh, quite uncontrollably, and Scalise joined me.

"And what do you find so amusing?" Nicky asked icily.

I pointed to the picture. "He bluffed him. The scoundrel bluffed him. There's nothing there that can be used as evidence. There's no way of proving that those are pictures of Dykes and Bowman. It could be any two people."

"Maybe we can bluff Dykes, too," Scalise suggested hopefully. "We don't have to show him the picture

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—just tell him we've got it and get him to confess."

"There is no need to bluff Dykes," said Nicky coldly. "The picture is valid evidence. Why do you suppose Lesser took it in the first place? Certainly not because he wanted a snapshot of his friend—he could have taken that any time. He didn't have to wait until he was clinging to a ladder thirty feet or more above ground.

"No, he looked down and saw two men leaning forward against the wind with only the tops of their heads showing, so that at first glance they looked like a couple of toadstools. And that was the kind of subject he enjoyed shooting—the *coup d'oeil*. It was only when he thought about it afterwards that it occurred to him that the picture would show one figure with a derby hat framed against the astrakhan coat collar—that had to be Bowman; and the other showed a white streak bisecting his black head of hair—and that had to be Dykes. And what is more, the snow on the ground showed that it was taken the day before Christmas—our first snowfall of the winter."

Scalise nodded slowly. He looked at me and said, "It adds up. It all adds up."

I nodded. "And what do we do now?"

Nicky rose. He favored us with his frosty little smile, a pursing of the lips as though he had bit into a sour lemon. "I suggest that the good captain might call Professor Dykes and tell him to come down to Police Headquarters to claim his camera."

It was not until we were back in my office that the thought occurred to me.

"Nicky," I exclaimed, "there's something terribly wrong about our line of reasoning. We started out to inquire into Lesser's death. And then we got sidetracked into thinking about Johnny Bowman. But what about Lesser? Was his death an accident, one of those rare coincidences that occasionally do happen in real life? Or was it murder?

"And if it *was* murder, Dykes couldn't have done it, because he was with us at the time. And if it *wasn't* Dykes, then it must have been someone else. And if it was *someone else,* then our reasoning on Dykes is all wrong."

"Oh, Lesser was murdered all right, and it was Dykes who did it. I know how it was done, but I can't prove it—not that it makes any difference, since the penalty for two murders is no greater than for one. It was indicated in that same remarkable conversation."

At my look of complete confusion, he adopted the tone he uses to address one of his slower students. "You remember that after the price of the antenna was settled, Dykes asked if the fee included installation. And when Lesser agreed—"

"Dykes said he wanted it right above the dormer in back."

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Nicky chuckled. "It was like a chess game between those two—a chess game between two masters. You know, chess players of our caliber," he went on, "we're only too happy when we don't make any mistakes and don't fall into the more obvious traps. Theoretically, since everything is visible on the board, one ought to be able to counter every attack, however devious.

"But players like us, we can't help concentrating on what appears to be the main line of attack. We see the whole board, to be sure, but we concentrate only on the portion that appears to be threatened. But players of the caliber of Dykes and Lesser, they approach the game in a different spirit. The correct response to the position on the board is automatic with them. They play their opponent, concentrating on his psychological weaknesses.

"Oh, they were a precious pair of rascals. Lesser opened with a brilliant gambit. He not only made his blackmail proposition, but made it publicly under the very nose of the District Attorney."

"I suppose that's what you meant by his peculiar sense of humor."

"Precisely. Naturally he was elated—at his success, at his bravado, at his *panache*. When Dykes asked if the price of the antenna included installation, he interpreted it as an attempt by Dykes to salvage something, however small, out of a bad bargain—like a chess player who tries to take a pawn or two when he finds he's going to lose a major piece. Well, Lesser could afford to be generous, so he agreed. But Dykes had something else in mind.

"Oh, it was a magnificent counter! You remember how, when I played with him, his attack on my king turned out to be a diversion so that he could capture my queen—like a stage magician who focuses your attention on one hand while he does something else with the other. He worked the same trick on Lesser. To locate the antenna above that particular dormer called for setting the foot of the ladder right in front of the cellar bulkhead doors. And when we got out into the yard, he focused Lesser's attention on the roof and the top of the ladder, but it was the foot of the ladder and its position right in front of the bulkhead doors that really concerned him. And to position the ladder correctly above, it necessarily had to be in the correct position below—in front of the bulkhead doors. And those doors, you will recall, are so light that a child could lift them."

"You mean if anyone were to raise the bulkhead doors it would upset the ladder?"

Nicky nodded, his little eyes shining.

"But dammit," I protested, "that would mean someone had to be in the cellar. And it couldn't have been Dykes because he was with us at the time."

"Naturally. He saw to that. We were his alibi."

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I snapped my fingers. "His wife! She's been hiding in the cellar all along and—" My voice trailed off at his scornful look. "Yes, I guess that's kind of silly," I mumbled. "Dykes didn't know he was going to have to kill Lesser until a couple of days ago."

"Precisely. But there *was* a resident in the cellar, bigger and stronger than any child. A big brute of a dog. Dykes arranged to be with us as we walked up High Street. At the top of the hill we stopped, and Dykes saw that Lesser was on the ladder. We walked on, you and I, but Dykes stopped to tie his shoelace, and—"

"And what?"

"And blew his silent dog whistle."

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a NEW story by JACOB HAY

Lucius J. Belkamp looked like a plain, ordinary businessman—in sewing machines. He was the most completely inconspicuous and forgettable man this side of the Iron Curtain. In appearance and manner he was therefore the perfect spy—indeed, so perfect that even the professionals, even the expert counterprofessionals, had no chance against so formidable a secret agent . . .

THE BELKAMP APPARATUS

by JACOB HAY

IT WAS LUCIUS BELKAMP'S WRETCHED misfortune to be everywhere mistaken for a spy, although this was hardly surprising. Anyone with a cover story so unimpeachable as Lucius Belkamp's simply had to be a spy, in the considered view of quite a number of exceedingly astute chiefs in those shadowy departments whose business is espionage and its prevention.

For one thing, he was inconspicuous. Too inconspicuous; too absolutely forgettable. Five minutes after you had met him you would be unable to remember what color his eyes and hair were. His clothing was neither notably American or European in cut, and his neckties seemed to be all one color, somewhere between a very dark blue and black.

For another, there was his job. It was too pat. World Sales Research Representative of the New American Standard Sewing Machine Company of Grand Rapids, Mich.—that's what his calling cards read. Ha!

For still another, there was Lucius' miserable luck, for that is the only way to describe it. It was pure coincidence and nothing more that brought him to the Congo on the eve of the bloody disturbances there; a fouled-up airline schedule took him to Addis Ababa just hours before a military coup attempted unsuccessfully to topple the Conquering Lion of Judah from his throne. A missed train connection caused him to arrive in the capital of yet another monarchy, this one middle-eastern and corrupt, moments after a plastic bomb had eliminated the king and several of his more obnoxious ministers in a splendid burst of flame and noise. And so it had gone for Lucius wherever he went.

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Word of this sort of thing has a way of getting around in intelligence circles abroad, although, of course, it did not at first reach the Central Intelligence Agency. It is widely accepted in these same circles that there is no point in disclosing to a foe, real or potential, that you are aware of the identity of a man you feel reasonably certain to be one of the foe's top operatives. Instead, in Moscow and Warsaw, in Cairo and Johannesburg, in Paris and London, dossiers began to be compiled. In Ebensburg, Pa., Lucius' birthplace, strange men, posing as F.B.I. agents conducting a routine security check, learned every detail of Lucius' youth and schooling. Other questions were asked of the dwellers in the apartment house in Grand Rapids where Lucius maintained his austere bachelor's flat for those brief intervals between his global travels on behalf of the New American Standard Sewing Machine Company.

In accord with the most modern espionage practice, Lucius was never arrested, never detained at a border for examination of his baggage. Rather he was placed under constant surveillance by the counterespionage departments of whatever country he chanced to visit in his ceaseless quest for new sales areas. His rooms and bags were then quietly and invariably searched in minute detail. The fact that nothing was ever found during these searches served only to increase the admiration of the counterintelligence chiefs charged with keeping an eye on Lucius.

"An agent formidable," was the view of the Deuxième Bureau.

"Sehr klug," was the phrase applied by the Gehlen Organization. The Russian loses something in the translation, but it amounts to much the same thing.

"Whatever it is, he's up to something big and hush-hush," the chief of M.I.5 said to his deputy as they conducted their monthly review of Lucius' now-bulging dossier. "In any event, the Yanks haven't briefed us on him as they normally do. We'll do well to keep an eye on the chap."

God alone knows how many man-hours were wasted as cryptanalysts pored interminably over Lucius' meticulously detailed reports to his superiors in Grand Rapids. His code was never broken because it didn't exist, but the conviction remained unshakable that his glowing descriptions of the potential markets to be exploited in such places as Kuwait, Dar es Salaam, and Copenhagen concealed a wealth of secret information. One consequence of this was that all over the world, the holders of New American Standard Sewing Machine franchises were added to the lists of people to be rounded up in the event of a national emergency.

Of all this, Lucius remained blissfully unaware. Sometimes his bags were not precisely as he had left

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them on departing from his hotel room, but this was only to be expected of foreign chambermaids. Frequently his sales research reports were long delayed in arriving in Grand Rapids, but foreign postal services, Lucius knew from long experience, often left much to be desired.

Sometimes, too, he had the feeling that somebody was following him, and on such occasions he transferred his wallet from his hip pocket to his inner breast pocket. No point in making it easier for a thief.

He was in his hotel room in Toulon when he received the first of what became a series of inexplicable callers.

"Monsieur Mercier, our dealer here, advises excellent prospects for the new Astra De Luxe model," Lucius was writing when his phone rang. The desk clerk asked whether he would receive a Monsieur Gerstenstein. Of course, replied Lucius, wondering who Monsieur Gerstenstein was.

Monsieur Gerstenstein proved to be a short plump man in a rumpled suit and with an air of quiet desperation. He was sweating freely, and the first thing he did on entering Lucius' room was to walk swiftly to one side of the French windows and peer nervously in both directions along the Rue du Citie. Then he turned to Lucius.

"If it's a dealership you want to discuss, I'm very much afraid that the Toulon franchise has already been assigned," Lucius said politely —he was always polite, but he made a mental note that Gerstenstein was not the sort of person he would want to represent New American Standard; the man was positively furtive. To his mild astonishment Monsieur Gerstenstein's pasty face broke into a knowing grin.

"They told me you were a clever one, Herr Belkamp," he said in a heavy Teutonic accent.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Ten thousand dollars, unmarked bills, to my account in the Bank of Zurich," declared Gerstenstein with finality, extracting a thick manila envelope from his coat pocket. "For this," he added, patting the envelope. "Everything—cranes, lifting capacities, machine shops, docks—the whole works, including manpower figures."

"My dear sir—"

"The French Navy itself has no more explicit plans of the Toulon dockyards, believe me, Herr Balkamp."

"The Toulon naval base?" Lucius was dumfounded, his eyes—were they brown or gray, or possibly blue —wide. "Let me assure you, sir, that I haven't the slightest use in the world for your plans. In fact, I can't possibly imagine why you should think I would."

Gerstenstein was a professional. He shrugged and returned the manila envelope to his pocket. "Ach, so. I should have known better. Of course, you already have the plans

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of the Toulon dockyards, so why should you pay for another set?" Gerstenstein clucked admiringly. "You Americans," he continued, shaking his head. He clicked his heels. "It has been a pleasure meeting a master of our profession. Perhaps next time I can offer you something for which you will have a need. I expect to have the plans of the French atomic installations in the Sahara by the end of the year."

Lucius could only shake his head numbly in reply to this absurd suggestion.

"You Americans. Amazing." Gerstenstein shurgged again. "The Poles will pay only six thousand, but beggars can't be choosers, can they? *Auf wiedersehen,* Herr Belkamp."

Lucius watched the plump man leave and then returned to his report, dismissing Gerstenstein as a hopeless lunatic with some kind of dockyard fixation. Since his room was on the sixth floor of the Hotel de la Poste he heard nothing of the incident on the street below, of a sadness unspeakable, when a large black Citroen, appearing as it were from nowhere, thundered down on Monsieur Gerstenstein, killed him dead as a mackerel, and roared away from the scene. In the ensuing commotion, a young and very clever Polish intelligence agent was able to slip the manila envelope from Gerstenstein's pocket and thus save his government six thousand dollars, American.

"This would seem to be the first time that Belkamp has exercised his license to kill," the head of the Deuxième Bureau noted in his own report on the death of Gerstenstein. "Not suprisingly, the police have been completely unable to establish even the slightest connection between the death and this supremely brilliant operative. More intensive surveillance is indicated."

"I should say something's building; the chap's getting a bit desperate," was the view of the chiefs of M.I.5 and M.I.6 on hearing of the affair.

"Gerstenstein was simply out of his league," was the verdict in Bonn. "Another small-time freelance up against an expert. What could he expect against Belkamp?"

A few weeks later, in Stockholm, Lucius received another caller, named Axelson, who offered to supply him with a map of Norwegian coastal minefields and navigational aids planned in the event of a Russian invasion. Once more, Lucius declined. He was becoming annoyed.

"Dammit, Axelson, I'm in the sewing machine business! What the devil would I want with a map of a bloody minefield?" Lucius had picked up more than a few Britticisms from his many visits to the sceptered isle.

"You Americans," replied Herr Axelson, grinning, for he too was a professional. "Always one jump ahead."

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Axelson was briefly lucky. The Norwegian counterintelligence officer driving the Volvo sports coupe missed him by a clean foot and was, as a result, severely reprimanded. A few weeks later, however, Axelson, a skilled and enthusiastic alpinist, was killed in a fall during a lone ascent along a route often suggested for beginners. The Norwegian counterintelligence officer subsequently received the Order of St. Olaf, second class, with oak leaves "for conspicuous services to the Crown." But that was in Oslo.

In Stockholm, once again the police could trace no connection between Lucius and the unfortunate Axelson. As was the case in France, the intensive investigation was carried out with the utmost secrecy, so Lucius was quite unaware that he was the focus of inquiry. "The Swedish market remains strong, but there are signs that a slump in overall sales can be expected during the fourth quarter," he wrote to his superiors in Grand Rapids. "A larger advertising budget is recommended."

From Stockholm, Lucius journeyed to West Berlin. The German competition was, he well knew, tough and well-organized, but in Germany, as elsewhere, there were always a certain number of people who would buy anything with an "imported" label on it. By now his rooms were, as a matter of routine, fitted with sensitive microphones concealed in the telephones, the chandeliers, and beneath the beds. The adjacent rooms were always occupied by men with head-sets and electronic gear of exquisite precision, and they worked around the clock.

Lucius always enjoyed his visits to West Berlin. There was a gaiety to the place, mixed with an exhilarating sense of danger, emphasized by the grim wall dividing the city. A sense of hazard and adventure invariably filled him when his train passed through the Russian Zone from West Germany, relieving him for a few hours of the essential, albeit admittedly dull business of estimating the market for sewing machines. He enjoyed visiting the night clubs, and treated himself to the best restaurants.

But this time, he felt, things were not quite the same. Nothing he could put his finger on, nothing tangible, just the vague feeling that something was not quite right.

Why, for example, had that beautiful blonde night-club hostess practically thrown herself at his head on that first evening in town after a day spent with Herr Hentschel, the West Berlin distributor for New American Standard? Lucius was well aware that he was not especially attractive to women, but the voluptuous blonde who had joined him, uninvited, at his table had as much as suggested that she return to his hotel room with him. Why she should have been so deeply interested in his recent travels was not

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clear. Nor was the reason for her inscrutable smile whenever he mentioned sewing machines.

"Ahv gorse, dahlink," she kept saying. She was, she said, a Hungarian refugee and her name was Irena Betenyi. She did not mention that she was also a second lieutenant of the KGB.

But she had been very attractive, Lucius thought the next morning as he brushed his teeth. Musing thus, he reached for his bottle of mouth wash, only to have it slip from his grasp and crash to the floor.

"Damn!" said Lucius, and wondered that he had never noticed that his mouth wash had a curious fragrance, like vanilla, say, or no—almonds, that was it, almonds.

In her flat Lieutenant Betenyi rued her need for haste the previous evening. Making the switch, she hadn't tightened the cap on Lucius' bottle properly and now her best evening bag was a soppy mess.

Then, too, there had been that close call. Most of the war damage had been long since cleaned up, but almost every day some hitherto unknown weakness showed itself in the surviving structures. Another foot, Lucius pondered to himself, and I would have been under that heavy chunk of falling cornice.

No, there was something not quite right about this West Berlin visit.

What Lucius did not know was that SMERSH was under orders to kill him.

It was bound to happen in the long run.

And finally it brought him to the attention of the Central Intelligence Agency, thanks to yet another bit of Lucius' perenially bad luck, yet another of those odd-ball accidents. This one took place in Hong Kong.

"My congratulations," the chief of British intelligence was telling his C.I.A. opposite number as they sat over a sundowner in their mutual club. "I see your man Belkamp finally got Subaroff."

"Our man Belkamp? We've got no Belkamp, my dear chap."

"Come now, old boy. You know very well that Ding How Chee, who says he's the Hong Kong distributor for some make of sewing machine, is really a part of the Belkamp Apparatus. Well, for your information, revered colleague, as I was walking to the club I passed a nasty accident. Poor old Subaroff had been hit by one of Ding How Chee's delivery vans. Dead as a doornail. I wonder who they'll send to replace him. In his own way he was rather a decent sort for a Russian." The Englishman sighed. "But those are the risks we station chiefs must take, I'm afraid."

"My God," said his American friend, "I shouldn't care to be in this fellow Belkamp's shoes. If they've put SMERSH on him, there's not a thing that can be done to save him. Tell me more."

"Are you serious? He really isn't one of your people?"

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"Never more serious in my life, old friend."

By the next day the Central Intelligence Agency knew all that the British knew about the Belkamp Apparatus.

"Clearly," the Director was telling his first deputy, "the operation is enormous, and purely mercenary. So far as I am concerned, Belkamp is a renegade. But who's he working for? And why should we try to protect him? Maybe it's just as well he is put out of the way."

"Of course, it will appear accidental."

"Of course," said the Director. "In the meantime initiate a dossier. I doubt it will be a long one."

Originally Lucius had planned to spend a week in West Berlin, but his increasing unease made him decide to cut short his visit and proceed to Madrid, one of his fastest-growing sales regions. The new Astra De Luxe model, with its special hemstitching attachment, should go over big in Madrid, although he could wish for a dealer with a little more get-up-and-go. Señor Morales y Varga was a great believer in the siesta.

He telephoned the hotel desk and asked the clerk to reserve a seat for him on the Thursday morning plane from West Berlin to Paris and Madrid, first class. The company was most generous in its travel allowances.

The SMERSH chief for West Berlin had been reluctant to accept the coded instructions he had received from Moscow. Why not, he had demanded, pick Belkamp up, rather than simply eliminate him? Under expert questioning he would surely reveal all there was to know about his organization.

"Every intelligence agency in the world has attempted to infiltrate the Belkamp Apparatus and failed," came back the reply. "Until now he has killed only his own people. He has struck us once; he will surely strike again. Carry out previous instructions."

So Lieutenant Betenyi had been assigned and the heavy cornice had fallen.

"What next?" asked the crestfallen SMERSH operative who had worked for some hours in the cold darkness before dawn at weakening the cornice. "The old hit-and-run bit?"

"Too obvious, Brodski," his chief had answered worriedly. "It would alert his second-in-command and the whole operation would dive underground. At least now we know where they are. The important thing is to make it look natural."

"And now he's off to Madrid. I'd hate to blow up a whole planeload of people, Chief."

"I say let's pass the whole thing over to Madrid. They have a hell of a lot of accidents in Madrid and the Spaniards are a hot-tempered bunch to begin with."

"You want me to give it one more try, Chief?"

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"Okay, one more. Otherwise leave it to Madrid."

But the hypodermic needle never got through the close-packed plastic credit cards in Lucius' wallet, which he had placed in his breast pocket, feeling that he was being followed again as he walked through the crowded streets to his West Berlin dealer's showrooms. He was quite unable to figure out, though, why the inside of his wallet should have become filled with some kind of transparent, sticky fluid. Curiously enough, it also smelled a lot like his mouth wash.

The Wednesday evening before his flight, Lucius treated himself to an excellent dinner. Now that he was on the point of leaving, West Berlin seemed to have regained its charm and he was mildly sorry that he would have to spend this last night in his room, composing his report to the home office. He saw little hope that Herr Hentschel's volume of sales would show any appreciable growth, but there was no doubt that as an advertising gesture, the West Berlin showroom was worth supporting, especially if New American Standard diversified further in the field of home appliances.

"There appears to be a growing demand for the rechargeable electric toothbrush," he was writing in his precise hand when, very quietly, the door of his room opened and a tall handsome young man, dressed very roughly, stepped inside and shut the door softly behind him.

"What the hell?" Lucius demanded angrily, rising from his desk. "Don't you people ever knock?"

"Herr Belkamp?"

"That's right. Lucius J. Belkamp, and what I want to know is just what the hell you think you're doing here."

"*Gott sei dank,*" muttered the young man, and collapsed wearily into one of the room's two armchairs. "I was afraid I would be too late," he continued in excellent English. "Permit me to introduce myself, if you won't mind my not rising."

"Not in the least," replied Lucius, coming as close to irony as he ever did.

"Kronau, Konrad, Colonel. You will, I am certain, have heard of me."

"Why on earth should I have heard of you?"

The handsome young man's smile was as weary as the rest of him. "Please, Herr Belkamp. The time for discretion is past—it is no longer necessary for you to pretend that you have not heard of Colonel Kronau, the deputy chief of intelligence of the Army of the East German People's Republic. Certainly, *we* have heard of *you.*"

"You have?" Lucius was genuinely taken aback, and slightly frightened. He had absolutely no desire to engage the attentions of anyone beyond that bleak wall cutting through Berlin.

In the rooms adjacent, two teams

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of men tensed over their listening equipment, their faces unbelieving.

"Well, you have your own methods, so I won't press the issue," Colonel Kronau said. He produced a manila folder, of the sort with which Lucius was becoming painfully familiar, from the inside of his leather jacket and extended it wordlessly to Lucius. "All yours, mein Herr. The Russian order of battle and our own. Artillery positions and munitions dumps. Airfields. You must get it to your chiefs in Washington, Herr Belkamp. It is priceless."

"Me? Washington? Look, Colonel, my next stop is Madrid. What in God's name would I do with this stuff? I don't know what's been going on lately, but if you want to peddle whatever this is, why don't you go to our Embassy in Bonn?"

"Because we know you are the C.I.A.'s top man in Europe, maybe in the whole world, but I have no time to argue. Look, Herr Belkamp, I haven't a hope of getting back alive, and when they discover I've defected, this place won't be safe for me for three seconds. I'm not asking you for help or money. Just take this and get it to Washington."

"The C.I.A.'s top man in Europe?" Lucius repeated numbly, and then the enormity of it broke over him. He sank back into the chair by the desk, his knees turned to gelatin. This stranger was making a hideous mistake!

Konrad Kronau, Colonel, pushed himself to his feet and tossed the manila envelope onto the bed. His heels came together smartly as he bowed, ramrod stiff, from the hips. "And now I have done what I set out to do fifteen years ago. The Russians will remember Konrad Kronau to their sorrow. Now, Herr Belkamp, I shall take the liberty to disappear. A plane is waiting to take me to Sweden. It has been an honor to meet you, sir."

As silently as he had come, the Colonel took his departure, having struck his blow for whatever it was he was striking for. Lucius was never to know.

He had no idea what Kronau had given him. Too young to have served in World War II, he was already in Europe for New American Standard when the Korean conflict began and sputtered to its end. Nor was Lucius a reader of fiction; being a great believer in self-improvement, he stuck to nonfiction. But clearly the Colonel had set great store by the contents of his envelope.

Equally clearly, Lucius realized, so would their rightful owners. He had read enough to know that if the envelope were found in his possession, he stood an excellent chance of being shot as a spy. On the other hand, Kronau's absurd statement that he, Lucius J. Belkamp, was the C.I.A.'s top man in Europe was a strong indication that the poor fellow had come unhinged, perhaps by his experience in defection, if he had, in fact, defected in the first

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place. That was it, obviously; the man had gone off his rocker, like that peculiar fat man in Toulon. There seemed to be a lot of it going around—especially around Lucius.

Soothed by this explanation, Lucius reasoned that the night's fantastic events were no cause to interfere with his employer's business. Perhaps the envelope really had some value. The most logical course would be to deliver it to the American Embassy in Madrid and let them deal with it. Surely they would have somebody who would know what to do.

Having reached this conclusion, Lucius stuffed the envelope into his suitcase and retired for an unbroken night's sleep, grateful that his own mental health was sound, untroubled except for the thought that he was going to look pretty ridiculous walking into the Embassy in Madrid and asking them to forward an envelope to Washington.

Not only look but feel an utter fool, Lucius decided two days later as he walked up the imposing steps of the United States Embassy in Madrid. He would have delivered his envelope immediately on his arrival, but Señor Morales y Varga had gone to the trouble of meeting him at the airport and then insisting on one of those prolonged Spanish dinners. Lucius had felt it would be rude to decline. They were some distance from the airport when the faulty fuse of the bomb planted aboard Lucius' plane went off.

"Mr. Lucius Belkamp to see anybody who would be likely to know anything about the C.I.A." he told the receptionist in the Embassy courteously, hoping she wouldn't mistake him for some sort of crank. He had given one of his business cards to avoid just such an impression.

"It was one of the damnedest moments of my life," the C.I.A.'s station chief in Madrid was to tell his superiors later. "The head of the Belkamp Apparatus—Lucius Belkamp himself!—walking right into my office, as cool as you please, with a SMERSH death sentence on his head. I don't know what I expected, but it wasn't this plain, ordinary business type in a gray flannel suit—or was it brown? So anyhow, he has the indescribable gall to say, ever so casually, that he's got an envelope which might be useful to us. Useful! My God, when I got a look at what was in that envelope!"

"How he succeeded in getting Kronau to defect we'll probably never know," said the deputy charged with reviewing the Belkamp affair. "Nor how he has so far succeeded in keeping out of harm's way."

"They'll never get him. The man's luck and audacity are beyond belief."

"I don't suppose you approached him on the possibility of giving up his independent operation and coming to work for us?"

"You know Belkamp. I did hint at it, but he stared me straight in the eye and said he was in the sewing

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machine game. He looked as if he thought I was crazy or something. So no dice. He's strictly a loner." There was an undisguised note of admiration in the Madrid station chief's voice.

"And you say he plans to return to this country?"

"That's correct. In fact, he's there now, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His story is that there's some kind of sales meeting to promote something called the Astra De Luxe. With hemstitching attachment."

The deputy grinned shrewdly as he reached for his telephone. "Yeah, sure. Just the same, let's not take any chances. Operator? Put me on the scrambler to the F.B.I. and bring the Director in on a conference line—"

And in Grand Rapids, Mich., Mr. Elwood Sprenkle, President of the New American Standard Sewing Machine Company, was welcoming Lucius Belkamp back home again. "Nice to have you back, Lucius, and this time it's for good. I'm promoting you to Vice President of our new Home Appliances Division, with offices here. Meantime I hope you'll tell the boys what our European customers want. How was this last swing of yours, anyhow?"

"Very quiet, really," Lucius replied, flattered by all the attention the President of the Company was giving him, and delighted by his promotion. It was nice to be back home in Grand Rapids where you didn't run into all kinds of nuts and where your mouth wash smelled like a mouth wash should.

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

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The mystery was a peculiar one. Each day Harry Teasdale, a man of fixed habits, did his farm chores five minutes earlier than the day before; and every evening Harry would appear in the taproom of The Flute and Bells five minutes earlier than the night before . . .

THE INFALLIBLE CLOCK

by COLIN WATSON

IT WAS MR. PETER HARVEY, THE OLD man, who came out to take charge of the sale. That in itself made it something of an occasion. He had been one of the best-known auctioneers in Flaxborough in his time, but he was 83 now and although he still insisted on putting in nine hours' work at his office every day he rarely did any actual selling.

Perhaps sentiment brought him out on this particular occasion. One or two of the oldest villagers said they remembered the last time the cottage changed hands—in 1902—and believed that Peter's father had let him take the bids. The highest had been that of the father of Harry Teasdale, the present owner. Harry, of course, was not there then; he was born about four years later.

The cycles of existence are more revered in the country than they are in cities. So it was natural enough for us to assume that old Harvey had arrived for the sake of marking a turn of his personal wheel. On the other hand, he might simply have been tempted out by a golden autumn day and the knowledge that a country auction tends to be as much a social entertainment as a business transaction.

There was a third possible reason.

Curiosity.

Old Harvey would have known as well as we did the circumstances of this sale. Harry Teasdale was selling because his wife had left him.

Off she had gone, a month before, almost to the day, with a tractor spare-parts salesman from Birmingham. No village can pretend indifference to a piece of liveliness of that order. The rings of its marveling spread out for miles. They must have lapped to Flaxborough and into the offices of Harvey, Treadgold and Stiles within a week of Bertha Teasdale's defection.

Bertha was at least ten years younger than her husband. The difference, quite noticeable when they stood posing for the photograph in the *Flaxborough Citizen* captioned "Easter Bride For Local Farmer," had become less obvious with every year of marriage. Some said that life with Harry was like a hard winter: it broke down all natural features.

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Certainly, when Bertha was last seen out with him in public, it was Harry at 60 who looked like the junior partner.

That is what made her affair with the salesman such a matter for wonder. There was no question of its being mere boasting by fat, dowdy Bertha. The man actually had been seen to call at the cottage on at least four occasions, at times when anyone would know better than to expect a farmer to be at home. Anyway, who would have been barmy enough to try and sell Harry Teasdale a spare part? He used his machinery like his wife: what he couldn't repair by his own hammering he left to rattle.

Then there was the trip that Bertha had taken in the direction of Flaxborough one afternoon in the salesman's little blue truck. According to those who saw the pair drive out, she was sitting up there beside him, neat and proud as a quart of new milk. And if she did come back that evening, it's odd that she wasn't seen.

Well, perhaps not all that odd, because when she did finally go off for good not a soul in the village knew about it until two days later. Then it was Harry himself who made the announcement—grudgingly slipping it into the taproom talk of The Flute and Bells while he counted the change he'd got with his fourth pint.

Harry was not the most communicative of men. Even the farmers reckoned him "close," which in their vocabulary is muteness absolute. So when he kept that mean old mouth of his out of his beer just long enough to growl, "The missus 's cleared out," there could remain none so skeptical of amatory miracles as to doubt that Bertha had won and departed with her prize.

In the weeks that followed, Harry was watched carefully for signs of such effect as sudden wifelessness might be expected to have on a man of regular, if bleak, domestic habits.

Some thought he grew more morose and irritable; others declared uncharitably that that would be impossible. Women, who are sensitive to such things, were inclined to note more missing buttons, more split seams and frayed cuffs, than the man had shown before. They also convinced themselves that he looked hungry. But that notion could have arisen more from their loyalty to Bertha than from their sympathy for the deserted husband.

There was one peculiarity about the man's behavior, however, on which everyone was agreed: the pattern of his life began to shift forward.

If it had simply grown erratic we should have understood. A man suddenly left to get along on his own does tend to become disorganized. He loses track of things. He eats scrappy meals at all sorts of odd hours. Even sleeping and waking seem difficult to manage properly after you've been accustomed for

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years to a woman calling you down to breakfast and nudging you off to bed at night.

But it was not regularity that Harry lost. At first he seemed to be going about his work exactly as before. Then, quite gradually, we noticed this queer change: each day he did everything just a little earlier than he had the preceding day.

On a Monday, for instance, he would come out into the yard at 7:30, start his rackety old tractor, and be off in the fields for the morning. Then, after whatever he'd had for his midday meal, he could be heard starting the tractor again at 1:45.

On Tuesday he would leave the cottage at 7:25 and again at 1:40.

By the end of the week we'd be listening to that tractor blasting off at 7:00 and at 1:15.

Equally puzzling was the steady advance of Harry's evening appearance in the taproom of The Flute and Bells. For years he had pushed open the door and given that surly, suspicious grunt of his that passed for a greeting to the company at as near 8:00 as made no difference. So on the night that he arrived at 7:55, Ben the landlord made no more of it than to reach up and alter his own clock there and then. It was only later, when Harry gave the news about Bertha, that Ben reflected that grief might have driven Harry out of his fixed routine for once; he checked with the radio and quietly put the clock right again.

The next night Harry materialized ten minutes early. The night after, fifteen. No degree of grief, Ben concluded, could account for so drastic a disruption of a lifetime's habit. He was very piqued indeed. As were the rest of us.

Discuss it as we might, however, it was not until the day of the auction sale that we received a clue to Harry Teasdale's mysterious behavior.

Nearly the whole village had turned up at the cottage. There must have been 40 of us. We hung about outside, chatting in groups, then took turns to file through the poky little rooms and to satisfy our curiosity as to the Teasdales' manner of living. Apart from his steady drinking, Harry was no great spender, so none of us was surprised to find that he had added virtually nothing to the few bits of crude furniture left to him by his father.

Most of these were in the kitchen, the room which the couple appeared to have used almost exclusively. It contained a deal table and three rush-bottomed chairs, a couple of greasy, crippled armchairs by the fireplace, a set of shelves with half a dozen chipped, gray-looking plates and a few odd saucers and mugs, an empty fern pot on a bamboo stand, and something that might have started life as a bookcase but which now was stuffed with a jumble of papers and tools and farm catalogues, cans of meat and beans, and half-emptied jam jars. There was

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neither a radio or a television set. Although the cottage had been wired in a rather primitive fashion for electric light, we could discover nothing in the way of electric appliances. Poor old Bertha, we decided, had not left home to escape over-indulgence.

The furniture had a slightly crazy air. Each piece leaned at a different angle from the rest. Nobody remarked on the fact; the floors of most old country houses are wildly uneven and we could see from the ridges in the ancient, half-rotten linoleum that this one was brick, probably free-laid on sand.

The room was dominated by its sole feature of beauty and value—a brass-faced Eighteenth Century grandfather clock. Its reddish-black case, lustrous with age, reached from the floor to within half an inch of the ceiling beams. The clock had stood there, about midway along the wall farthest from the window, for more lifetimes than anyone knew, always changing owners with the house, of which it had come to be regarded as an inseparable part.

Everyone who came into the kitchen looked first at that clock. We all knew it was there, of course. It was quite a local celebrity among clocks. Even so, to see it relatively close at hand, looming over Harry Teasdale's squalid, makeshift possessions, was a startling experience. It was like peering into a cheap boarding house and finding oneself faced by the Archbishop of Canterbury. And a tipsy archbishop, at that.

For the clock was more than two hours fast.

The reason for the strange acceleration of Harry's routine was now clear. He had depended all his life on that clock's impeccable timekeeping. Half of what little conversation he had to offer consisted of the legend of its infallibility. He was literally geared to it. So when the clock had started to gain time, it was inevitable that Harry should speed up as well.

That was one riddle solved. But the greater mystery remained. Why had the clock suddenly gone wrong after more than 200 years?

Although he did not say anything, old Mr. Harvey was obviously as perplexed as everybody else. He arrived in that venerable Daimler of his at precisely the advertised time of sale and marched briskly into the cottage with his little entourage of clerks. He, too, glanced first at the grandfather clock. We watched him frown, pull out his heavy old gold watch, stare again at the clock, and then hold the watch to his ear. As he put the watch back in his waistcoat pocket, we could see the effort that pretending unconcern cost even this wily old professional.

Away he started, though, with his "desirable" this and "soundly constructed" that, and all the other reasons why we should be fighting to buy Harry's "period residence of interest and charm, together with

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rich arable land measuring twelve acres and three roods and eight perches or thereabouts." Every now and then the old man would give a little wobble to the handle of his thick auctioneer's walking stick and fix one of us with his eye, as if to impart a personal, confidential guarantee of the truth of what he was saying.

It was all a performance, of course —a traditional ceremony that deceived none of us for an instant. The cottage was a damp-ravaged relic of the days when agricultural laborers and smallholders were housed at par with their pigs. Its dozen acres were sticky and stone-laden, and old Harvey knew it. But in spite of the audacity of his spiel—or partly because of it, perhaps—the old man was heard out in respectful silence.

Only Harry Teasdale, glowering at us from the corner in which he leaned, remained unimpressed. He seemed impatient to be rid of all those staring interlopers.

The bidding started at £300. Mr. Harvey affected to be regally amused. "The whole estate's on offer, gentlemen, not just the clock." We laughed politely and the price jogged up in hundreds to nine. There it stuck.

"I'll take fifties," said Mr. Harvey, very condescendingly.

Three more bids were made. The last, at £1050, came from the man we already knew was determined to have the place. He was a retired businessman from Nottingham and he had been unwise enough to declare to one of the locals that his one remaining ambition was to spend the rest of his life in the peace of the countryside. The only question after that was how much we should make him pay for the privilege. It was lucky for him that Harry Teasdale was the vendor. If there was one thing that we desired less than letting a "towny" make a good bargain, it was helping Harry to make one.

"Come, gentlemen," said Mr. Harvey. "Have I really heard the last from you?"

Apparently he had. Everyone seemed paralyzed. We knew that right up to the moment when the heavy stick came down, clonk, against the floor, for even to draw breath would have carried the risk of being lumbered with twelve worked-out acres and a decrepit cottage.

"Once, at one thousand and fifty pounds—"

Dead silence.

"Twice—"

The final pause, charged like a thundercloud, seemed to stretch into minutes.

Then, exactly as the ferrule of the stick hit the floor, there came the first clang of the old clock striking six.

The time was actually a little before 3:30.

The crowd's tension was released in sudden boisterous laughter. There were jokes about the clock.

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Somebody suggested that it had made a bid. "Have you got it trained, Harry?" "Not to keep proper time, he hasn't."

The clock's ex-owner scowled up malevolently at its golden, lying face, and limped away into the yard.

Mr. Harvey was looking at his watch again. He seemed troubled, as old men do when memory and present reality clash. "It doesn't *sound* the same, either," we heard him mumble to himself. "Now why should that be?"

The new owner, Parkinson, moved in a month later, after disposing of nearly all the land to his farming neighbor. A firm of builders had tidied the cottage up for him and done some long overdue repairs. It had also installed some more or less civilized plumbing and cooking arrangements.

There were no big changes, though; Parkinson was as soft in the head as most city people and he had the idea that cracking it against low doorways and stumbling over floors like plowed fields somehow made life marvelous.

As for oak beams, they were Mrs. Parkinson's notion of heaven. She had a little beaklike mouth, and almost any time you passed the cottage you could look through the window and see the mouth saying "quaint" while she showed off those beams to some visitor or other.

We wondered occasionally what Harry would have made of all the admiration that his old dump received from the Parkinsons' town friends. He had decamped promptly with his money, and not a word had been heard of him since.

No one had unearthed any information about Bertha, either. The salesman still made an occasional appearance in the district, but there is a limit to what one can extract, in the course of friendly conversation, from a man who has helped himself to somebody else's wife—especially when his seems a case for condolence rather than congratulation.

We went on trying, all the same.

At least, we did until the news got around of what the clockmaker had found.

Mr. Parkinson, as will have been gathered, was highly delighted with what he called his "rural retreat." But he had suffered one minor disappointment, and as the uneventful days of his retirement glided by, that disappointment became a preoccupation and an obsession.

The fine old clock—*his* clock, now—continued to belie its reputation for perfect timekeeping. And however often his wife fondly condoned its behavior as "quaint," Parkinson remained enough of a businessman at heart to fiercely resent what he considered to be a breach of warranty. A variation of a minute or so a week—that he would have been prepared to accept in a spirit of rural tolerance. But to gain five minutes a day—no, the thing was making a fool of him.

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He sought advice from his neighbors. We could only repeat what everyone knew, that until recently the clock had been absolutely reliable.

Then did we have any idea of what might have gone wrong with it? Would Teasdale have been mean enough to sabotage it before leaving?

We refrained from the blatant perjury of saying no. There is a way of looking dubious that leaves such questions open without compromising village loyalty.

In the end Parkinson had to call in a clock repairer from Flaxborough.

This man presented himself one Tuesday afternoon a little before 3:00. Now that happens to be the time when the Parkinsons are reached by the baker on his midweek route, so an account of the clockmaker's findings became public property by Wednesday morning.

First of all, he had opened a little door in the side near the top of the clock and taken a long look at the cogs and ratchets and so on. There was nothing wrong there, apparently, so he opened the front of the case. He squatted down on his heels and did some more investigating with a flashlight. After about a minute he suddenly turned and said, "You've shortened the pendulum."

"I damn well haven't," said Parkinson.

"Well, somebody has," said the clockmaker. "So you needn't be surprised that it's running fast." According to the baker, he sounded very contemptuous, as if he'd caught Parkinson out. "And what's more, this case has been ruined. Some idiot's sawn three or four inches off the bottom."

Parkinson was too surprised to be mad. He told the clockmaker that what he suggested was quite impossible. The clock had been there more than 200 years, fitting exactly between floor and ceiling. "And can you tell me," he asked, "how on earth a clock could be chopped four inches shorter and still stand to within a finger's thickness of those beams?"

We agreed with the baker that it was a good question. He said the clockmaker had just shrugged, packed his bag, and walked out without another word.

Parkinson never did any more about the clock's queer timekeeping. He eventually let the thing run down. The hands stopped one day at 6:45 and there they have remained. His wife is still fond of pointing out its "quaintness" to their visitors, but Parkinson seems to have lost interest altogether.

So we have to rely on the baker for a progress report. He says that the gap between the top of the clock and the ceiling has now widened to an inch and a half. It will get still wider as the floor settles, of course. As we've said, Bertha was a fairly hefty woman.

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It shouldn't be surprising—but it is—to learn what interesting mysteries can occur in a high school . . . Here is the third in the series about Mr. Strang, science teacher at Aldershot High School, and this case is a "natural": Who stole the answers to the final exam in chemistry? Who and how and when? The "why" is, of course, obvious—but the other elements in the mystery justify its being called "an impossible crime" . . .

MR. STRANG FINDS THE ANSWERS

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

MR. STRANG WALKED UP THE steps through a haze that might have been fog and onto the decorated and flag-draped platform. Three men wearing high silk hats and cutaway coats smiled at him. He wondered if his old tweed jacket with the leather patches at the elbows was suitable for the occasion, but there really hadn't been time to change. Amid thunderous applause, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, and then the main speaker rose and approached the microphone which would carry his words of praise for Leonard Strang, Aldershot High School's veteran science teacher, all over the planet . . .

"Mr. Strang, whaddya use lime water for?"

With an almost audible "pop," Mr. Strang's dream of glory faded into the reality of the classroom. He raised his head and considered his Lilies of the Field.

Guy Oringer, Ward Hilditch, and Alan Speed—in mentally dubbing them the Lilies of the Field, Mr. Strang was only half correct. For while it was certain that in the academic sense they toiled not, their ability to spin was amply proved by fantastic yarns concerning undone homework and late entrances to class. In fact, it was their unique ability to procrastinate that accounted for their presence in Mr. Strang's classroom at a time when all other students and teachers had long since left.

"Carbon dioxide bubbled through lime water will turn it a milky white, Guy," Mr. Strang replied wearily, "and if it doesn't work, you get an incomplete in chemistry. That experiment should have been done two weeks ago."

The teacher wrinkled his nose at the musky odor of hair oil as Guy Oringer slicked his locks into place with a pocket comb. "Well, you see, Mr. Strang," he said, "I was sick when you assigned it, and—"

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"—and in about five minutes I'm going home whether you're finished or not. I hate to hurry you, boys, but it's after five o'clock, and you've been here since three thirty. Now either finish those experiments or take the consequences."

Each boy bent to his assigned task with a diligence that would have guaranteed a listing on the Honor Roll—if the diligence could have been maintained for more than ten minutes at a time.

Finally the three approached Mr. Strang's desk. Ward Hilditch held out a flask of Benedict's solution with one hand while he nervously inspected the fingers of the other in a fruitless search for a fingernail that hadn't already been gnawed to the quick. Guy Oringer presented a beaker of lime water of a satisfactory whitish color with the élan of one who had discovered a cure for an incurable disease. And with a cackle that any mad scientist in a horror movie would have been proud to utter, Alan Speed exhibited a lump of black, spongy carbon as proof that he had been able to separate table sugar into its component elements.

"Gentlemen, I'd like to say I'm proud of you," sighed Mr. Strang. "Unfortunately, the words would stick in my throat. However, you will be allowed to take the final examination next week."

"Will you tell my mom and dad I can take the test?" asked Ward, still nibbling on a nonexistent fingernail. "They were real sore when they found out I might have to go to summer school."

"I've already written letters to your families, telling them the good news," Mr. Strang replied, "but up to now it's been questionable whether they'd ever be sent. I'll mail them on my way home. Now wait until I get my brief case, and I'll walk you as far as the door of the school."

He went to a door at the rear of the classroom, which led to the chemistry storage closet, where he had left his brief case. He opened the door wide, took a deep breath, and stepped back, coughing and gasping.

"What's the matter, Mr. Strang?" asked Alan, finding it hard to keep from laughing.

Pulling off his black-rimmed glasses, Mr. Strang rubbed his eyes with his handkerchief. "Ether!" he gasped when he could catch his breath. "The whole closet reeks of ether! Is this your idea of a joke, Mr. Speed?"

Alan's smile faded from his face as he understood what the teacher was implying. "Oh, gee, Mr. Strang," he wailed. "I didn't do anything. It's just that you were hopping around rubbing at your eyes and—well, you looked so funny that—oh, gee!"

Holding the handkerchief firmly over his nose, Mr. Strang entered the closet. It was deep enough so that he was out of the boys' sight

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for several seconds. When he came back through the door his mouth was set in a grim line, and his eyes glittered menacingly. "Ward Hilditch, Guy Oringer, Alan Speed—sit down!" he said slowly and distinctly, pointing to each one in turn with a rigid index finger.

Trouble! Mr. Strang usually called students by their first names. On rare occasions, when formality was necessary, he used last names, but always preceded them with "Mr." or "Miss." The last time he had addressed a student by both first and last name, that student had been expelled. The three boys knew that whatever was the matter, it involved something more serious than spilled ether.

"I've cleaned up the ether," said the teacher thickly, "and almost asphyxiated myself in the process. The fumes should dissipate in a few minutes. Then I have something I'd like you to see."

The classroom clock ticked off three minutes, while Mr. Strang fanned the closet door back and forth vigorously to force fresher air into the small room. Then, he beckoned to the boys.

Most of the wall space in the storage closet was lined with shelves containing a variety of scientific supplies and apparatus. An empty ether can lay in the tiny sink, along with several cleaning rags. In one corner of the room was a coat rack on which hung Mr. Strang's overcoat and battered felt hat.

"Look!" said the teacher, pointing one slender finger at the floor below the coat rack, where his brief case lay on its side. And then the boys knew the reason for his anger.

Although the brief case was still locked, one side was wide-open. It had been cut through with a knife or some other sharp instrument.

"Now who did that?" barked Mr. Strang. For one of the few times in his teaching career he was dangerously close to losing his temper.

Silence. The boys looked at one another. Even Alan Speed, who normally had a quip for every occasion, knew better than to open his mouth. But finally Guy Oringer asked, "Why would anybody do a thing like that?"

"Correction, Mr. Oringer," said Mr. Strang. "The question is, 'Why would one of you three do a thing like that?' I didn't put my brief case in here until after you were in the room, and no one else came in.

"But for the benefit of the two innocent parties, let me elucidate. Inside that brief case is—was—a copy of the final exam in chemistry which you will take next week. As senior member of the department, I was going to take it home this evening to check it for possible typographic errors, a fact that was not unknown to the students. Attached to the examination was a test key—a single sheet of paper containing the answers to all the questions except the essays. I'd be very much

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surprised if one of those items isn't missing—or both of them!"

Quickly the teacher leafed through the contents of the mutilated case. A set of essays, still uncorrected, was in order. A packet of letters still had its rubber band around it. Privately Mr. Strang hoped that the letter to the parents of one of the three boys might be missing, but no such luck. Even the final exam was there. The answer key, however, was gone.

"Well, at least, whichever one of you took it was intelligent enough not to try to get out with the exam itself," said the teacher. "Ten pages would have been quite a wad to slip past me. I suppose the guilty one expected to be well away from here before I discovered my damaged brief case."

"Does—does this mean we can't take the final exam after all?" asked Alan, now almost in tears.

"That exam took more than six weeks to make up," replied Mr. Strang. "It's impossible to replace it at this late date. And if there's a possibility of the answers having been exposed, it may be that nobody will take the final exam. Now who has that answer key?"

Mr. Strang suspected that he would get nowhere by appealing to the boys' sense of honor. In his years of teaching he had tried it too many times, with at best only negative results; he was no longer shocked by the idea that teen-agers are not wholly honest and truthful.

"May I suggest," he continued, "that each of you submit to a search?"

The boys gave frightened nods. A few minutes later they were dressed only in their shorts and all their clothing had been examined; the contents of their pockets were on Mr. Strang's desk, and the answer key was still missing. Guy Oringer and Alan Speed laughed nervously at their near-naked condition, while Ward Hilditch munched at the end of one finger and stared at the floor.

"Protozoa, Mesozoa, Porifera, Coelenterata," muttered Mr. Strang. This recitation of animal phyla made him feel no better. He had lost the answers, and he had asked three of his students to strip in his classroom. There would be telephone calls from irate parents. And Marvin W. Guthrey, Aldershot High School's principal, was not known for taking a firm stand in adversity. He would call Mr. Strang to his office the following morning. The teacher winced at the thought of Guthrey's sarcasm, which could cut like a knife.

A knife—that was it. Whoever cut open the brief case must have used a knife. All he had to do was search the three piles of belongings on his desk.

As he did this, Mr. Strang smiled broadly at his own cleverness. Ward Hilditch had a folding knife. It was tiny, but when the teacher got it open at the cost of a broken thumb-

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nail, he found that its scratched and battered blade would easily have been able to cut through the leather of the brief case.

When he had finished sorting through the second pile, Mr. Strang's smile slipped a bit. For Guy Oringer also carried a knife. It was bulky and had enough gadgets to equip a machine shop. Guy insisted on displaying each of them and explaining its use. There were no less than six different tools which might have been used to slit the case.

By the time Mr. Strang examined Alan Speed's belongings he was right back where he had started. By pressing a catch on Alan's knife the teacher almost succeeded in amputating one of his fingers. Switchblades were forbidden in Aldershot High School, but this did not concern Mr. Strang at the moment. The fact was that each of the three boys carried equipment capable of having cut open the case.

Mr. Strang looked at the boys. The room still reeked of ether, and his head had begun to ache. The ether bothered him in another way. What was the point of it? The can had been kept on the highest shelf in the closet, so it certainly hadn't been spilled accidentally. Whoever had slit the case must have used the ether for something. But what? Was it supposed to put the teacher to sleep?

Mr. Strang shook his head in annoyance and spoke to the boys. "I don't suppose any of you remember who was the last one to be in the storeroom before I went in?" he drawled, his voice dripping with irony.

They didn't.

"Well, at least I know the answer key won't be going out with you," he continued. "I'll go on with my search after you leave. Now get dressed."

After he had escorted the boys, once again fully clothed, to the door of the school, Mr. Strang checked the classroom and the storage closet with a thoroughness that would have turned a customs inspector green with envy. He scrutinized the desks, he opened and peered into the bottles of chemicals, he probed the cracks in the woodwork, and he pulled down the window shades to see if the missing sheet of paper had been rolled up in one of them. Mr. Strang even searched his own pockets on the off chance that he himself had inadvertently taken the answers from his brief case.

At the end of a frustrating hour he reluctantly came to two inescapable conclusions:

First, none of the boys could possibly have taken the answer key away with him when he left the classroom.

And second, the missing answers were no longer in either the classroom or the storage closet.

For a moment Mr. Strang seriously considered the possibility that one of the boys had chewed and

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swallowed it. But there would have been no point in doing that *before* the teacher had found his damaged brief case, and there had been no opportunity afterward. Marching into the closet, he jammed his arms into the sleeves of his coat, crushed his hat down onto his head, and then, in a burst of irritation, he kicked viciously at the brief case. It skittered across the black-tile floor, and Mr. Strang saw the glint of a metal object that had remained hidden beneath it throughout his search.

His stiff joints cracking, he knelt and picked up the object. It was a dime. And Mr. Strang was sure it hadn't been there when he had first placed the brief case on the floor. He put the coin on the brief case and shoved at it with a finger, listening to the small sharp clink it made when it hit the floor. "Funny," he muttered. "It seems to me that if it was dropped, anybody in here would have heard it hit the floor." Thoughtfully he put the dime in his pocket.

Mr. Strang consigned the three boys, the answer key, and Mr. Guthrey's temper to the devil, and prepared to leave. Absent-mindedly he grasped the brief case by the handle, lifted, and was rewarded by a cascade of papers which poured through the gaping hole in its side. Unmarked assignments, the bundle of letters, and the final examination lay strewn across the floor of the closet.

"Oh, Sipunculoidea!" he cried at this last outrage against his dignity. He retrieved the final exam, put it into a cupboard, and snapped the lock. Then he gathered the uncorrected papers into a pile, folded the pile in half, and stuffed it into a coat pocket. He debated whether or not to mail the letters on his way home, decided that since he had to go to the drugstore anyway he might as well, and crammed them into his pocket on top of the other papers. "With my luck," he growled, "I'll drop the wrong thing through the slot, and tomorrow there'll be twenty-eight essays delivered to homes all over town."

He walked out of the building to his battered automobile. Roaring angrily out of the parking lot, he yanked at the steering wheel and headed toward the business district of Aldershot. There he stole a parking space from under the headlights of a waiting taxi. Then, still fuming over the loss of the answers, he completed his errands, treating the druggist with lofty disdain and leaving the man behind the stamp window at the post office an amazed and innocent victim of one of Mr. Strang's rare temper tantrums.

When he reached his rooming house he rocketed into the driveway, narrowly missing the yellow cat which belonged to his landlady, Mrs. Mackey, and stopped the car with a screech of brakes. He entered the house prepared to oppose any views Mrs. Mackey might make

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concerning the weather, only to find her on her hands and knees, fumbling in the pile of the living-room rug.

Mrs. Mackey knew better than to ask what the trouble was; she could almost see the steam coming out from under Mr. Strang's collar. She limited herself to a noncommittal "Hello," and continued prowling over the rug, an envelope clutched in one fist.

"Picking daisies, Mrs. Mackey?" asked Mr. Strang sarcastically, and was immediately ashamed of himself.

Mrs. Mackey stopped, picked up something from the rug, and placed it in the envelope. "Not daisies—pearls," she answered.

"What?"

"Pearls. The string on my necklace broke, and the pearls went all over the rug. I just found the last one." She held up the envelope triumphantly.

Mr. Strang nodded and headed for the stairway. He was halfway up when he turned his head to where Mrs. Mackey, in the living room below, was pouring the pearls into the palm of her left hand. A wide smile crossed the teacher's face.

"Of course," he said to himself. "That must have been the way it was done."

He climbed the rest of the stairs, did a little dance step at the top in what he fondly hoped was a fair imitation of Vernon Castle, or perhaps of Fred Astaire, and said happily, "Leonard Strang, you are a fat-headed idiot."

Once in his room, he took a copy of his class list from a bureau, looked up Ward Hilditch's telephone number, and began to dial the instrument next to his bed. "Mr. Hilditch, please," he said a moment later. "This is Mr. Strang, Ward's chemistry teacher."

He made two more phone calls—to the other two fathers—and then sat back to await his visitors.

It was past eight o'clock when Mrs. Mackey called Mr. Strang to greet the first of his guests. "Mr. Oringer," he said to the scowling man who was removing his overcoat, "good of you to come."

"Good, my foot!" rumbled Paul Oringer. "What did you expect me to do? The idea, threatening to fail Guy without even letting him take the final examination." Removing from his pocket a comb which might have been a twin of the one his son carried, Oringer began to draw his hair over an incipient bald spot. "I heard about what happened in school today," he continued as he combed. "You should be ashamed of yourself, making Guy take his clothes off in the classroom. As a lawyer, Mr. Strang, I ought to—"

Whatever Mr. Oringer was planning for the teacher was interrupted by the arrival of Benjamin Hilditch. Hilditch's hands shook visibly as he unbuttoned his coat, and he had

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a habit of clutching at one ear, much as a drowning man might grasp a life preserver. Mr. Strang remembered Ward Hilditch's almost nonexistent fingernails and wondered if his father's ear was the adult equivalent of a "security blanket."

Before Hilditch could do more than mumble a polite greeting, Winslow Speed entered the living room. More reasonable than Oringer and more vocal than Hilditch, he admitted that his boy might be capable of stealing the answers, but he wanted to know what proof the teacher had of his son's guilt.

Mr. Strang led the three men to his room. Warning them not to trip on the threadbare spot in his rug, he offered them seats while he himself perched on the edge of the bed.

"Now I'm willing to keep an open mind about this, Mr. Strang," began Oringer. "Only tell me, where in hell do you get off, acting like a—"

"Paul Oringer, close your mouth," said Mr. Strang. "You always were too talkative, even when I taught you physics in high school. I see maturity hasn't changed you much."

"That's one on you, Paul," chortled Hilditch, still holding his ear.

"Look, Mr. Strang, you called us here, so let's get down to business," said Speed. "I'm not too happy about the way you handled things with our boys today—at least, from the way Alan tells it. But I'd like to hear your side of the story."

"For the benefit of anyone whose child may have given a slightly biased view of the day's events, let me review exactly what did happen," said the teacher. Swiftly he described what had gone on in the classroom before and after the disappearance of the answer key. "So you see," he concluded, "it's obvious not only that one of the boys made arrangements to get the answers, but that those arrangements were successful."

"You made my boy strip," said Oringer. "Right there in the classroom."

"Oh, come off it, Paul," said Speed. "This thing involves every kid who's taking chemistry. What did you expect him to do, just let someone leave with all the answers? What about it, Hilditch? If you caught three guys in your store, and you knew one of 'em was a shoplifter, what would you do? Just let 'em walk out on you?"

"No, I suppose not," said Hilditch nervously. Mr. Strang was afraid the ear would come away in his hand.

"That's different!" shouted Oringer. "Mr. Strang is—"

"How is it different?" asked Mr. Strang softly. "The stolen answer key represents, I'd say, a great deal more work on the part of various individuals than one of the keys Mr. Hilditch sells in his hardware store."

"Look," said Oringer, "kids are going to cheat, right? You did it, I

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did it, we all do it. Can it be that wrong?"

"Yes," said Mr. Strang simply.

"Oh, come on!" Oringer shook his head impatiently. "Everything today is test, test, test. Schools, jobs, the Army—everything. And if a kid fails, the doors start closing. All he gets are the dirty jobs."

"I'm inclined to agree that testing can be overdone," said Mr. Strang, "but does that mean we should do away with it entirely? Mr. Oringer, if you took on a partner in your legal work, wouldn't you sometimes like to know what kind of job he was doing, just out of curiosity if for no other reason? Most businesses have a quality check on the products they manufacture, don't they? And the product which, hopefully, the schools produce is educated citizens."

"Oh, for Pete's sake, be reasonable. Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Strang, that you never sneaked a look at an answer while you were taking an exam? Never?"

"What we're talking about," said the teacher, "is not a weak-willed individual suddenly giving in to temptation. We are talking about a deliberate plan to steal—"

"I still don't think it's stealing," said Oringer.

"What would you call it, Paul?" Winslow Speed asked grimly.

"Why—why—"

"It is stealing, and nothing less," said Mr. Strang. "It was the theft of a year's work in chemistry from those students who may not now be allowed to take the final exam."

"All right," said Oringer in his best cross-examination manner, "let's say it was—er—stealing, and get down to cases. I'm even willing, under the circumstances, to overlook the impromptu strip tease in the classroom. But I'd like to ask one question: Why should all three boys be punished for what only one of them did?"

"A good point," said Mr. Strang. "So if one of you should be on hand when the thief picks up the missing answer key, we'd all know who the guilty one is, wouldn't we?"

The three men sat forward in their seats. "You mean you know where the answers are?" asked Speed finally.

"Yes, I know."

"Then why don't you get them?"

"Impossible. The men guarding them—"

"What!" Paul Oringer stood up and looked down at the teacher. "You mean whoever stole the answers had a gang working for him?"

"In a sense, yes."

"I think you're cracking up, Mr. Strang," said Oringer, sitting down again.

Benjamin Hilditch detached his hand from his ear and drummed his fingers nervously on the arm of his chair. "This is more serious than I thought," he said. "A gang. I had no idea . . . You can prove what you're saying, of course."

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"Certainly." Mr. Strang stood up, jerked his black-rimmed glasses from his nose, polished them on his necktie, and held them tightly between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand. Thrusting his left hand deep into his jacket pocket, he looked from one to another of the men in front of him. Oringer vaguely remembered Mr. Strang performing these rites before giving a lecture in the classroom.

"Fact one," began the teacher, holding up the glasses dramatically. "The missing answers did not leave the room when the boys left. Even a single sheet of paper has a certain amount of bulk to it, however tightly it is folded. And I went over the clothing and possessions of the boys with a fine-tooth comb. No, the answer key was still in school when I searched the classroom and the storage closet."

"Then why didn't the key turn up?" asked Spee.

"Because there was one place I didn't search."

"All right, Mr. Strang, I'll bite. First you say you looked *all* over the classroom and the closet. Now you say you didn't look *everywhere*. If that's the case, why don't you go back right now and get it?"

"Because it's no longer there."

There was a murmuring of voices. Then Oringer quieted the others. "You mean the guilty boy sneaked back and—"

"Of course not. Even if he'd been able to unlock my door, one of the custodians would have been sure to see him."

"Then who took the answers out of the room?" shouted Oringer.

Mr. Strang looked ruefully at the men. "I did," he said softly.

"You? Oh, come on, Mr. Strang, make sense. You took the answer key, but now a gang has it, and you know where it is but you can't find it. What's going on, anyway?"

"I didn't find the key in my classroom," said Mr. Strang, "because it never left my brief case—at least, until I myself took it out."

"But you said you *looked* in your brief case."

"I did. But not in the right place."

After a short silence Hilditch snapped his fingers. "The letters!" he cried.

"Go to the head of the class, Mr. Hilditch," said Mr. Strang. "Of course. The answer key was in one of those sealed envelopes I had prepared to mail to you three."

"Then the 'gang' is—"

"Our faithful postmen," replied Mr. Strang. "'Neither sleet, nor storm, nor hail,' and so on. It was a beautiful plan, really. Once the thief put the answer key in the envelope addressed to his own parents, I myself would carry it out, mail it, and the next day it would be delivered right to his door. All he had to do was be the first one to get the mail. He would be able to take the final exam, if it were given, and I would have no reason to suspect him more than the other two.

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It would have worked, too, if I hadn't seen my landlady earlier this evening putting some pearls into an envelope. That got me thinking about what else might have been stuffed into an envelope—and suddenly the whole scheme was crystal-clear."

"Wait a minute," said Oringer. "You said the envelopes were sealed. How could they have been opened without tearing the paper, to say nothing about resealing them?"

"Ether," said Mr. Strang. "What do you think of when I mention ether?"

"Why, putting people to sleep."

"Unfortunately, that was my first reaction, too. But ether is also an excellent solvent. A very small amount applied to the outside of the envelope flap would have softened the glue to the point where the envelope could be opened. It would have been easy for the thief to insert the answer key and then reseal the letter. As soon as the ether dried, the glue would harden again, and there would be nothing to show what had been done."

It was Winslow Speed who finally asked the question in the minds of the three fathers. "Who did it, Mr. Strang? Which one of our boys—"

"I don't know, Mr. Speed."

"What?"

"I don't know. But it shouldn't be too hard for you to find out. I suggest all three of you make a point of being on hand when your mail is delivered for the next day or so. There will be a letter from me addressed to each of you. But in the case of the guilty boy the parent will get something additional. Finding the answer key in your envelope should be convincing enough proof for any of you. From then on, whatever action you wish to take will be up to you."

When the men had left, Mr. Strang sat at his desk, idly flipping the dime he had found under the brief case. As proof, the dime wouldn't hold up in a court of law for thirty seconds. After all, it might have been dropped in the closet accidentally. But the science teacher was sure the thief had taken the dime out of his pocket deliberately.

It was because of the knife, of course. Two of the knives had opened easily—one much too easily, thought Mr. Strang, remembering the near miss with the switchblade. But one knife had been hard to open. It was tiny, and the blade was difficult to grip in its closed position. It would have been difficult to open it, he thought, especially if its owner had bitten his fingernails to a point where they were too short to hook under the notch in the tiny blade. He would have needed a tool—and a dime was thin enough to insert in the notch and flick the blade open.

But Mr. Strang had not had the heart to mention it and break a

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father's heart in front of the other men. "I must be getting old," Mr. Strang whispered to himself. "Now what do I do about giving the final exam?"

It was two days later when he found the package on his desk. Tearing off the wrapping paper, he found a new and expensive leather brief case with the initials. *L. S.* stamped in gold on one side.

There were two pieces of paper in it. One of them had printed at the top: *Chemistry—Final Examination—Aldershot High School.* The other was a handwritten letter that read:

Mr. Strang,

My father told me what you said the other night. But I saw the postman a block before he got to our house, and he gave me the mail with your letter in it. I didn't have any more ether to get it open, but the steam from a teakettle worked just as well, so my father was pretty happy when he opened the envelope and there was nothing inside but your letter. As for me, I haven't been too happy about anything since I took the answers out of your brief case.

Honest, I didn't look at any of the answers but if you don't want me to take the final exam, I won't squawk. And I'll accept any punishment the school feels I've got coming. But is there any way to keep my folks from finding out who took the answers? I'm not afraid of what they'll do to me, but it would just about kill my father and mother to find out what I did.

The letter was signed: *Ward Hilditch.*

Mr. Strang looked at the letter again, remembering a scared little man tugging nervously at one ear. Maybe something *could* be worked out . . .

He decided that he would have to drastically alter his dim views concerning honor among teenagers.

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Meet a new character—Mr. Godfrey Bodkins, London bookmaker (or turf accountant, as he likes to style himself), nicknamed most appropriately, Odds Bodkins. And you can bet this Wizard of Odds has some amusing (and perhaps amazing), chuckling (and perhaps chilling) tales to tell . . .

ODDS BODKINS AND THE £1000 WAGER

by RICHARD CURTIS

I'M SURE MOST OF YOU IN AMERICA followed the outburst of jailbreaks that took place here in England about a year ago. It's the kind of thing Americans love to read about us, but I can't say as how I appreciate the humor of it.

Of course, it all began when one of our most important prisoners, serving a term for treason, flew the nest. In the investigation that followed, it was discovered that the lad had brought very little ingenuity to bear on his escape. In fact, he had simply bashed out the bars of his cell window with a well-aimed thrust of his bootheel, and that was that.

Well, our newspapers had fun and games with it, and pretty soon authorities were admitting that British prisons are the easiest in the world to break out of. Evidently most of our jailbirds hadn't been aware of it, because the moment they read the reports in the press or saw it discussed on the telly, they all took to testing the allegation. For a couple of weeks they were escaping at the rate of five a day, till at last the police sent more screws to guard the prisons.

During the height of this exodus we bookmakers—or turf accountants as we like to style ourselves—started laying odds on the number of convicts who would go over the wall in one day. As you're no doubt aware, public bookies are licensed by H.M.'s government here, and their betting shops are familiar sites on almost every London street. Some would go so far as to say that our shops, along with Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, are the very foundation of English freedom. In any event, we'll bet on anything if there's enough money involved and the odds are right, and there are enough takers.

So one night at The Queen's Head pub, one of my colleagues, Tim Tubb, jokingly giving 5-to-2 against a prison break in the next twelve hours, got the notion that there were a large number of peo-

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ple prepared to put a few bob down in earnest on such a wager.

So the next day he released to the newspapers the following challenge: he would lay 5-to-2 that, during any twenty-four-hour period, one prisoner would escape from a British prison. The odds were 5-to-1 against two convicts doing it, 10-to-1 against three, 20-to-1 against four, and 33-to-1 against five. And if the better could name the prison from which the escape was made, Tubb would double his payoff.

When my own customers got wind of this they came around to my shop asking if I was prepared to lay the same bet. Now I'm not the sort to steal a colleague's idea, but on the other hand a bloke has to take advantage of whatever opportunities Providence puts before him. I'd have gladly referred my customers to Tim Tubb, but what kind of service would I be providing in sending them four blocks away in our nasty London weather? To put it briefly, I offered the same odds.

During the first week I had a lot of takers and, I'm afraid, a lot of winners as well. In the second week, though, as the police took sterner measures to keep inmates where they belonged, the receipts started to settle in my favor.

It was in the middle of the second week, however, that Fortune saw fit to bring to my shop the most unusual proposition I've ever heard.

It was mid-afternoon, that sleepy time between heavy lunch-hour betting and the end of the day when lucky punters come in to collect their winnings. There was little action other than on the nags—nothing exciting in sports or politics to motivate sporting gentlemen to place a bet. While I was toting up my cash at the back of the shop, my assistant brought in a cadaverous chap who, despite his sunken cheeks and pale color, looked rather distinguished in a blue hand-tailored suit, turquoise challis tie, and diamond stud. But he carried his brolly like a club, handle-end forward, and from this nuance and certain other details of his demeanor I was able to conclude that for all his pretenses to breeding, he was not exactly a gentleman. He was more likely one of your parvenus, who'd made his fortune in something common like machinery in the years since the war.

But as soon as he spoke I realized I'd been doping him too generously. There was something, you might say, shady about him. His voice had that confidential quality that comes from too many furtive conversations, if you understand what I'm driving at. We bookies have to recognize all types if we're to get along, you can be certain of that.

"You are Mr. Godfrey Bodkins?" he inquired.

"Yes, that's me. 'Odds' Bodkins, they nicknamed me."

Oh, he had no time for idle chitchat, this character didn't. "Do I

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understand you are giving odds on prison breaks for the next twenty-four hours?"

"That's what it says on the chalkboard, Guv, so I guess that's right."

"I'd like to put some money down."

"Pardon me for talking out of turn, but couldn't you deal with one of my associates out there? I'm trying to count up our 'umble receipts, as you can see for yourself."

"I have a large bet to place."

I put an index finger on the last figure in my ledger to keep my tally straight, and looked up at him. "How large?"

"One thousand pounds."

I sucked in my breath. One thousand quid—which is $2800 in American currency, as you know—is not a stupendous bet, but neither is it the size wager that a bookie of my modest turnover sees every day. It was big enough, let me state it this way, to cause me involuntarily to remove my finger from the ledger and lose my place.

"Well now," I said, trying to appear unruffled, "I might be interested in negotiating with you, Mr.—?"

"Smith," he lied.

"Yes, Mr. Smith, I'd be interested indeed. What precisely is the nature of your bet?"

"I'd like to bet one thousand that, within the next twenty-four hours, five men will escape from Smurthwaite Prison."

I was ruddy near paralyzed, and for a minute I just gaped. Finally I managed to croak, "Let me make certain you understand the odds, Mr. Smith. The odds are 33-to-1 against five men escaping from any prison. But by specifying the Smurthwaite Prison you're doubling the odds. In other words, if five men *do* spring Smurthwaite, I have to pay you 66-to-1 on your thousand quid. That's 66,000 pounds."

"You needn't review the figures for me, Mr. Bodkins. I calculated them thoroughly this morning. What I want to know is, will you take my bet or not?"

"You wouldn't want to give a man an hour," I said jotting some figures quickly on a pad, "to see what he could do about covering his bet, would you?"

"I'm afraid the matter is urgent," my friend said.

I did some more calculating and roved about in my mind for ways in which I could lay off, or hedge, this considerable bet. Needless to say, I could never cover it alone if I lost, but I might be able to get a few of my colleagues to come in with me.

And then, suddenly, I realized that all that shopping around was unnecessary. There was a much easier way to cover my bet. I almost rubbed my hands with delight at my cleverness.

Without further hesitation I said, "Very well, you're on. Cash on the nail."

Mr. Smith promptly removed

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from a fat envelope a neatly banded stack of ten-pound notes, which I thumbed with experienced dexterity. I'd count them more closely after he left, but the weight and thickness made them close enough to a thousand quid to satisfy me.

"If I should win," Smith said, "I will let you know the place and means of settlement. You can well appreciate that it might not be entirely wise for me to collect here in your shop."

"Oh, quite, quite!" I said, dashing off a receipt. I showed him out of the shop solicitously, but I could scarcely hold back my anxiety to be done with him so that I could get back to my office.

As soon as he was well down the street I rushed into the shop and picked up the telephone. I dialed Scotland Yard, of course.

Now Mr. Smith, he'd said it was "urgent" that he get his bet down. "Urgent"—a most peculiar word under the circumstances, don't you think? The only reason it could be urgent is that Smith, or whatever his real name was, knew about an imminent break at Smurthwaite. He was hoping to take advantage of some hapless bookmaker, but he obviously didn't know what he was getting into when he thought to outwit "Odds" Bodkins.

Now I suppose some among you might find it reprehensible that I should tip the rozzers about a forthcoming escape from the prison. But I look at it this way: Smurthwaite is one of our most important prisons. The convicts in it are some of the country's most dangerous blackguards. If I have foreknowledge of a break, isn't it my duty as a citizen to report it? In fact, might I not even be regarded as an accessory if I don't? When I think of our women and children living in terror as five ruthless criminals prowl about, it chills my heart, it does. So think twice before calling me a stool pigeon.

Well, I phoned the Yard and, anonymously, told the C.I.D. man that a rather unwholesome gent had just been in my shop laying too much loot on a Smurthwaite break. I advised the Inspector to send a regiment of bobbies over to the prison as soon as possible. He thanked me for my public spirit and rang off.

Naturally, every p.c. in North London was rushed to Smurthwaite and the old dungeon was double-cordoned. Inside, a constable was assigned to every cell block, and all exits were patrolled. Even the sewers and utility conduits were covered. It would've been easier to escape the earth's gravity that night than to break out of Smurthwaite Prison.

Twenty-four hours later I was gratified to hear on the wireless that only one prisoner had escaped from a British prison since the day before, and the prison was not Smurthwaite. I beamed with pride and gloated with greed as I laid Mr. Smith's stupid bet to rest in my safe.

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It wasn't until later that evening that I had a chance to study the details of the previous night's only jailbreak. Eddie Palmer, one of the most brilliant con men in England, had been sprung by a couple of bruisers directed—blimey!—by a cadaverous, well-dressed gentleman fitting the description of my Mr. Smith. The jail was the Plum Street House of Detention only three blocks from Smurthwaite. Every available copper had been taken off duty in the north part of the city, including Plum Street, in order to guard against the Smurthwaite break.

Well, though I'd failed as a citizen, at least I'd succeeded as a bookie. I'd won Mr. Smith's thousand pounds, and that would go a long way to pacify my conscience for having unwittingly abetted—if you'll forgive the pun—the springing of Eddie Palmer.

I decided to drop in at The Queen's Head to celebrate my mixed fortune with a pint or two. As I strolled over I wondered if it had been worth one thousand quid to Palmer and Smith to pull this stunt, but when I thought of how much dough Palmer was worth outside prison compared to what he was worth inside, I dismissed that line of reasoning.

It wasn't until I found my old colleague Tim Tubb, whose bookmaking challenge had started this episode, that I realized how sharp Messrs. Palmer and Smith had been.

"I'm flush today, Timmy," I said, tossing half a crown on the bar, "so I'll buy this round."

"You'll have to, Odds my boy. Today was my downfall."

"Why, what happened?" I asked my chubby, balding friend.

"Well—don't let this get around or I'll be a laughing-stock—but yesterday this gent comes into my shop and bets me four to one there wouldn't be a prison break at Smurthwaite in the next twenty-four hours."

I almost dropped my glass. "And what was the amount of his bet?"

"Ten thousand pounds, Odds. Ten thousand against my twenty-five hundred that no one would go over the Smurthwaite wall. Now you know there were three breaks from there last week and one on Monday, so I reckoned it was a good bet. How was I to know he'd call out the whole London constabulary to protect his wager? Twenty-five hundred quid it's set me back, Odds."

Trust Eddie Palmer to make a handsome profit even on his own escape!

"I certainly do commiserate with you, Timmy," I said, finishing my pint so fast you'd have thought the pub was on fire; and I rushed out before Timmy could see the grin spreading over my face.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 313th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . the story of a holdup artist who had developed a clean, efficient technique and a philosophy that politeness paid off—even in crime . . .

The author, G. R. Spencer, is in his late twenties; he was born in Charleston, West Virginia, and spent his boyhood there. After graduation from West Virginia University in 1962, he worked as a teacher, typesetter, and office manager (in that order?). Ever since his boyhood reading of the "Hardy Boys" books, he has always wanted to write, and now he has his own first story published. The "origin" of the plot is worth mentioning: the idea came to him when he was in a loan company office for a job interview. So, you see, every action (and reaction) is potentially criminal and/or creative . . .

THE POLITE MR. PAYNE

by G. R. SPENCER

JERRY PAYNE PARKED THE BLUE SEdan at the curb and rolled up the two front windows. He got out, carrying a small black bag like those usually associated with doctors. After locking the door and inserting two nickels into a meter for an hour of legal parking, he stood for a moment on the sidewalk in the sweltering heat. His car, he knew, would be an oven when he returned.

Payne wore a lightweight brown suit, a brown perforated hat, and large green sunglasses. His attire was fashionable for a hot summer day, but his collar and shirt were already sticky with perspiration. He saw passers-by moving languidly, slowed to a turtle pace by the enervating heat.

Jerry Payne looked at his watch. 11:35. Twenty-five minutes to noon. Ten minutes of casual walking would take him to the offices of the Americana Finance Company, which he intended to hold up with the revolver concealed in the black bag.

He began walking. Two blocks away sprawled the business district, and three blocks beyond it stood the McHale Building, where Americana had its offices on the third floor.

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Payne passed a parking lot with a No Vacancy sign displayed prominently at the entrance. At the rear of the lot were two flamboyant billboards. One proclaiming that a local newspaper was campaigning for courtesy in driving and was offering some kind of award. The other showed an elephantine picture of a silver-haired state senator with a plea for his re-election.

Next to the parking lot stood a magnificently solid edifice—the First National Bank. Jutting from the top was a sign which alternated blinking lights, informing the citizenry of the time and temperature.

Payne longingly eyed the solid structure. He had always wanted to rob a bank, where the really big money was, but so many of them were inconveniently located in downtown sections with stop lights and congested traffic, making a getaway a dangerous procedure. Perhaps some day he would talk himself into robbing a suburban branch, where no abundance of traffic signals would impede the acceleration of an automobile. For the present he was satisfied with his career as an itinerant loan-company robber.

The Americana would make his twelfth job. The other eleven, scattered in four states in as many years, had been very successful. Payne attributed his triumphs to his constantly moving about. Three jobs in one state, as far as he was concerned, saturated the possibilities of avoiding capture.

His last holdup had been a few months before in New Mexico. Then he had got into his car and driven over a thousand miles east, settling in his present location. Immediately, he had gained honest employment selling vacuum cleaners door to door. Money had not been his motivation for going to work. He had to live among people, feigning a law-abiding respectability, and nothing presented a more convincing façade of respectability than steady employment.

After he had covered the five blocks to his destination, Payne looked at his watch again. Fifteen minutes to noon.

The McHale Building was air-conditioned. Payne felt pleasantly comfortable as he took the elevator to the third floor and strolled down the corridor to the offices of Americana. On the frosted glass of the outer door were the hours: Americana closed its quarters between 12:00 and 1:00.

Before he entered, Payne gave his watch a third glance. Twelve minutes to noon. Carefully he wrapped a handkerchief on his right hand.

The reception office of Americana was spacious and pleasantly furnished. Payne walked to a long counter on the far side, approving the simple, homey décor. A sharp-faced elderly female with hennaed hair and thick horn-rimmed glasses got up from her typing at a desk to greet him. Payne saw a younger, plump blonde at another desk. She

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was sorting papers and did not give him a glance.

"May I help you, sir?" the elderly one asked.

"I want to see about a loan," Payne replied quietly.

"Fill out this form, please," the woman instructed, pushing a white card and a red-capped ballpoint pen across the counter.

Payne accepted the items and began to write in false information. Discreetly, he swung his eyes about to get his bearings. Behind the counter, aside from the desks of the two ladies and a row of filing cabinets, was a section of frosted glass which shut in a cubicle, obviously the sanctum of the manager. To Payne's right was a hallway which led to a row of partitioned rooms. Those, he supposed, were the conference rooms, where one who sought a loan could confer privately with the manager.

Finishing his misinformation on the card, Payne returned it to the elderly lady.

"Mr. Stephens," she read and pointed to the hallway. "Please go to Room D. Mr. Anse will join you shortly."

Payne nodded pleasantly and ambled down the passageway to a door with a D painted on it. Opening it, he found himself in a crackerbox room that was sparsely furnished. A square table, a chair on either side, and an ashtray were all he saw. Squeezing into one of the chairs, he carefully avoided touching any surface, and then patiently waited for the appearance of Mr. Anse.

The manager was not one to allow a prospective borrower to grow restive. A tall broad man with a buck-toothed smile and thin gray hair soon entered the room. He shook hands with a brisk, hard grip and sat in the chair opposite Payne.

"Mr. Stephens," Anse said, glancing at the card which Payne had filled out. "You wanted to see about a loan."

"Not exactly," Payne said, unzipping his black bag.

Anse's eyebrows arched a millimeter, and he looked expectantly at Payne.

"I don't want a loan," Payne explained. "I want a gift."

From the bag he produced his revolver and pointed the muzzle at Anse's forehead.

"What is this?" Anse demanded, rising from his chair. He was more angry than alarmed.

Payne was not astonished by Anse's reaction. Each person reacted in his own way to the sight of a gun leveled at him, and Anse, Payne thought, was acting more sensibly than some of the ninnies employed by other loan companies.

"Please resume your seat," Payne ordered in a calm, precise voice, and watched with satisfaction as Anse reluctantly sat down. "You appear to be an intelligent man adept at survival in a holdup," Payne said with calculated elaborateness. "In other words, you strike me as a gen-

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tleman who would not foolishly cause me to fire this revolver."

"I see no reason for you to fire the gun," Anse muttered.

"Nor do I," Payne agreed. "Not as long as my instructions are obeyed. I've seen two ladies and you in this office. Is anyone else here?"

Anse shook his head. "We're the only ones."

"Fine. Are the ladies of a hysterical bent?"

"No, I don't think so. Mrs. Hollister, the older woman, is a mixture of starch and pickle juice. The younger one, Mrs. Vota, may be a little nervous. But she'll remain calm."

"See that all of you remain calm," Payne warned. "I don't wish to shoot anyone, but any screams or other shenanigans will put a great strain on my nerves. Now, precede me back to the main office, and I'll allow you to inform the ladies of the true purpose of my visit."

Anse, his Adam's apple twitching, rose slowly.

"One more thing," Payne said, also rising. "Do you have a gun here?"

"In the top drawer of my desk."

"Is there one in the safe?"

"No, only the one in my desk."

Payne was satisfied. He scooped up the card he had filled out and dropped it into his pocket.

"I leave nothing for graphologists," he smilingly explained to Anse.

Next Payne picked up his black bag and held it in front of the revolver. He motioned Anse to lead the way to the outer office, and the manager, Payne admitted with admiration, cooperated splendidly. Anse walked naturally, without indecisive backward glances. He needed no prodding from the muzzle of the revolver. Payne wished all his victims would perform so sensibly.

Anse stopped before the counter and cleared his throat loudly prior to his announcement to the ladies.

"Mrs. Hollister, Mrs. Vota, please don't be alarmed and please don't do anything foolish. We are being held up by Mr. Stephens, and I beg you to cooperate fully with him. He is holding a gun at my back."

Mrs. Vota, the plump blonde, emitted a small gasp from an absurdly opened full-lipped mouth. She got up from her desk, staring in bewilderment at Anse and Payne. Mrs. Hollister made no sound. She looked rigidly at the two men.

"Do as Mr. Anse suggests," Payne told them with a grin. "I do not wish to hurt anyone, least of all ladies. But I become angry when someone tries to—er—cross me. So please be absolutely quiet and obey my instructions. Mr. Anse, lock the main door. If someone should walk in, he would be greatly embarrassed."

Anse moved to the outer door and pushed the catch of the lock down. Then he returned to stand helplessly in front of the counter.

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"Mrs. Hollister," Payne asked, "is that the pen I used to fill out the card?"

The lady nodded. Payne took the pen, dropped it into his pocket with the card, and said, "I leave nothing for fingerprint experts." Brandishing his weapon, he gave further orders. "Everyone into Mr. Anse's office."

The ladies obeyed while Payne observed them closely. They had to pass close to him and the revolver. If one was going to have hysterics, this was the most likely time. Mrs. Hollister walked by, her nose curled in distaste. Mrs. Vota's face was white; her eyes flickered nervously from the revolver to Payne's large green sunglasses, but she passed him without incident.

Payne was pleased by their subdued performance. He entered the office behind Anse, quickly closing the door.

The office was small, with a paper-cluttered desk, several chairs, metal cabinets, and a steel wall safe.

"Ladies," Payne said, "stand with your faces to the wall. Anse, open the safe."

While the three followed the commands, Payne turned the black bag upside down on the desk. Several rags and lengths of thick cord tumbled out.

When Anse had opened the safe, Payne tossed him the empty black bag and gave a terse command.

"Put the money in it."

Anse merely inclined his head and began to fill the bag with money.

"Ladies," Payne continued, "please turn around." He picked up one of the rags. "I have to gag you, and I realize it's quite an indignity, but I insist on these precautions."

He walked over to Mrs. Vota, who shrank against the wall, and stuffed the rag into her mouth, causing her protesting gasp to terminate in a muffled sob.

"Young man," Mrs. Hollister said stiffly, "you may think those ridiculous sunglasses are some sort of disguise, but I warn you, sunglasses or no sunglasses, if I ever see your face again, I will certainly recognize it. I have an excellent memory."

"That is a most commendable aptitude," Payne said politely. With pleasure he rammed the gag into her mouth. "But dear lady, I doubt if you will ever see my face again."

Anse had finished at the safe, so Payne took the bag and herded him over to the ladies. The manager also had a rag stuffed in his mouth.

"Everyone face down on the floor," Payne ordered.

With the stout cords he bound the hands and feet of all three, then he placed the revolver and the leftover rags and cords into the bag and zipped it shut.

"You've been a most sensible and cooperative trio," he said sincerely. "No one has been hurt, and I'm certain you will be found and untied in due time."

Before he left, Payne again cov-

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ered his right hand with a handkerchief, to prevent his fingerprints from remaining on the doorknobs.

Outside in the corridor he looked at his watch again. 12:13. A very clean and efficient job, he thought.

A few minutes later he was back in his car, which was as hot as an alcove of Hell. Whistling, he rolled down all four windows and felt refreshed by some cooler air. He put the car into gear and wheeled into traffic. He had not covered a half block when he saw a blind man standing in mid-block, desperately trying to cross the street.

The man, shabby and long-haired, with small dark glasses and a white cane, was off the curb, listening intently for the sounds of traffic. Payne braked his car and leaned his head out the window.

"Go ahead," he called out. "Nothing is coming."

The man grunted and tapped his way across the street to the opposite sidewalk.

Payne drove on. Later that afternoon he conscientiously worked his route and sold two vacuum cleaners.

The next evening Payne sat in an easy chair in his apartment and read about the daring daylight robbery of the Americana Finance Company. The $7300 reported by Anse tallied exactly with Payne's counting of the money. The paper said further that the thief's three victims had banged their feet on the floor for several minutes before someone in the room below was sufficiently annoyed to investigate the banging. A janitor had had to be summoned to unlock the corridor door. The victims had suffered only a case of nerves, and their description of the holdup man was reasonably accurate.

Average height, average build, brown suit and hat, dark brown hair, large green sunglasses, ordinary features. Payne thought it fitted him well, but it also fitted thousands of other men equally well.

The holdup man was extremely courteous, the paper went on. According to Payne's philosophy, courtesy always paid. Confronted by a polite but determined holdup artist, a victim was more likely to cooperate and act rationally than faced by a harsh, menacing robber.

Pleased by what he had read, Payne folded the paper and began his evening task of matching his skill with the daily crossword puzzle. Halfway finished and about to fill in two blank spaces in the word for fluid rock, he was interrupted by the ringing of the doorbell. He neatly printed AA in the two empty spaces, put the paper aside, and answered the door.

Three strangers confronted him. One held a flashbulb camera.

"Are you Mr. Jerome Payne?" a tall thin one inquired briskly.

"Yes, I am," Payne replied. He did not like the presence of a camera.

"I'm Clemson of the *Herald-*

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Post," the thin one said. "This is Markle from the *Herald-Post* and Officer Glock. You drive a blue sedan, license number AJ 6054?"

"Yes." Payne was confused by these inquiries. "But I don't understand—"

"Yesterday," Clemson interrupted, "a witness saw you stop your car to allow a blind man to cross the street. As you may know, the *Herald-Post* has been sponsoring a civic campaign to improve driver courtesy, and when we heard about what you did for the blind man we thought it special enough to merit an article in the newspaper. I want to interview you, and Markle is here to take your picture."

Payne frantically shook his head. "I don't want my picture taken—or an interview. What I did for the blind man was nothing—really nothing."

"Oh, please, Mr. Payne," the cameraman urged. "You're very photogenic." He raised his camera to his face and aimed it at Payne.

Payne struck out with the side of his hand, knocking the camera from the photographer's hand.

"Hey!" Markle yelled. "What in hell do you think you're doing?"

"Mr. Payne," said Clemson, startled by the outburst. "There's no cause to become belligerent. All we want is—"

"Hold it, Clemson," the third man said.

He was a towering figure with an ugly red face. He stepped forward and frowned at Payne. "Mr. Payne, I'm a city patrolman. I'm the witness who told the newspaper about your courtesy to the blind man. You may think it's nothing, but it's a damn nice thing to do. When I saw what you did, I wrote down the license number of your car so I could find out who you were and inform the newspaper. It fitted in with this courteous driving campaign, and I thought—"

He stopped. His frown vanished and was replaced by a look of recall.

"It was a few minutes after noon," he said, concentrating on an image in his mind. "You wore a brown hat, green sunglasses, and, I think, a brown suit."

He stopped again, staring hard at Jerry Payne. When he resumed speaking, his tone was severe and official.

"Mr. Payne," he asked deliberately, "why don't you want your description and photograph published in the newspaper?"

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a *memorable* short story by

JOYCE CARY

Joyce Cary didn't decide to become a writer until he was past thirty. He had studied art in Edinburgh and Paris but gave up a career in art even though he had become a fine painter. He had served in the Balkan War, been decorated, and had then joined the Nigerian Political Service, fighting with the Nigerian regiment during World War I and later being the only white administrator in a remote and primitive district in Nigeria.

His earliest attempts at writing turned into a prolonged and painful series of rewritings, and his first two novels, not published until he was in his mid-forties, were almost total failures. But by this time he saw his way, and persisted. Success, financial and critical, came slowly, even in England, and his work did not begin to appear in America until after World War II. But with THE HORSE'S MOUTH, A FEARFUL JOY, *and* A PRISONER OF GRACE, *Joyce Cary finally achieved international recognition: he has been called one of the most distinguished of modern novelists, and perhaps the only English novelist who truly wrote in the tradition of Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy.*

Elizabeth Janeway has said of Joyce Cary that no other contemporary writer "is at once so unsentimental, so rational, and so perceptive . . . who can combine the toughest-minded realism with mood and insight and character-drawing that is like a lightning flash."

You will find these qualities—tough-minded realism, perception, character-drawing—in this memorable short story by Joyce Cary. We wonder if any American author could have written this particular story; no, it had to be written by an Englishman . . .

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THE SHEEP

by JOYCE CARY

TOMLIN, HAVING COME IN FROM the garden, settles down by the fire with his pipe and a paper. He has round him all the comforts of an old bachelor retired from business on savings, who understands exactly how to please himself chiefly by limiting his desires. His health, carefully nursed, his digestion, are perfect; at 65 he is still able to eat anything he likes. He does not, however, indulge himself in such things as lobsters, mushrooms, or elaborate savories, because, although he likes them, he suspects that they might be bad for him. He intends to enjoy his leisure for a long time still.

He opens *The Times,* ready for the keenest enjoyment of his day. He never reads *The Times* until evening, in order to have all day the pleasure of this anticipation.

Suddenly the phone rings. Like all old bachelors' phones, it is within reach from his armchair. He picks it up and hears a hoarse voice, "Willie, this is Peter."

"Who?"

"Peter—Peter. Don't tell me you've forgotten Peter."

"Peter?"

"Yes, Peter—Peter, P for pee, E for eats, T for tight, E for more eats, R for racket—Peter. Now, look here, old boy, there's something you can do for me. And you're the only person who can do it."

"Excuse me—but are you sure you've got the right number?"

"Right number? You're Willie, aren't you? Willie Tomlin. Damn it all, old boy. This is PETER—Peter Blew, of the Somme. We were wounded on the same day. I must be your oldest friend."

Tomlin, casting his mind back 40 years, to the front line of the '14-18 war, does now recollect a Peter Blew, but with uncertain feelings. The vision that springs from some cavern of the past is of a young second lieutenant with a great deal of hair, a great deal of swagger, and a great line of blarney. According to himself, he can beat the bookies at their own game, and have any woman he likes, on sight. He is, however, not very popular among his brother officers, being given to sponging, lying, bragging, cheating, and disappearing when there is work to be done.

It's true that they were both wounded on the same day. He remembers very well the base hospital where they lay in the same ward—Blew with a slight arm wound, pic-

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turesque and painless, Tomlin with two holes in his stomach, extremely ill. Blew is the darling of the nurses in a day, he keeps them in fits of laughter with his wonderful tales. Especially about little Willie at the war. Little Willie in this case is Tomlin. And Tomlin, out of pure self-respect, must laugh also at these legends. To laugh, for him, is agony. And when he laughs Peter Blew makes a bleating noise and says, "Hear the dear old sheep."

This word sheep, as Blew knows, enrages Tomlin. It has pursued him from childhood when, in a large family, he was always the one to be ordered about, to take the part of Boer in a war game or horse in a bullfight. In those days he had never been without bruises, and his black eyes were so rich and numerous that they became a family joke.

His mother would say, "Poor Willie is so good-natured."

Willie himself did not accept this explanation. For he resented his fate. He longed to be the fierce hussar, killing people with a sword, the ruthless cold-eyed matador, the wild bull. But he never got a chance.

And here is this four-letter man Blew, a shyster if ever there was one, pinning him with the same tags.

It's not true and it's not fair. Why should Blew get away with it, with everything? It can't go on.

But when both come out of hospital, Blew gets a job at the base. His Colonel, a prejudiced old regular, thinks he is better out of the front line, that for all his swagger and his trench knife, he lacks the offensive spirit, that he is deficient in something called leadership. Everyone has noticed that in the actual presence of bullets, Blew becomes modest and self-effacing.

Tomlin, on the other hand, is returned to the trenches as soon as he can stand on his feet. He is not very adventurous but his men will follow him anywhere. And he is wounded twice again before the end of the war.

He remembers even more vividly a meeting years after the war, with a red-faced fellow of 30 or so, who calls on him at Hammersmith. Tomlin is still living with his widowed mother in the family house, a small terrace house in a street just one step removed from the squalid. All the same, it has been a hard fight for Tomlin to keep this house for his mother. He is her only support. His father, a curate in this same parish, has died young of T.B. and general overwork at 52, leaving nothing but debts, themselves pitifully small.

His elder brothers and sisters, all prosperously married, are extremely sorry that the expenses of their families prevent them from affording any help. He is lucky, they say, to be a bachelor and free from this terrible burden of modern family life for the professional man.

Tomlin resents their meanness—even though he does not particularly want to marry, he does not see

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why he should be deprived of the possibility. But, with this sense of injustice, he is all the more proud of his neat little house, so cleanly kept.

All the same, life is dull and he is flattered when Blew comes to call. He has forgotten his hard feelings of wartime and is pleased to see an old comrade, especially in such fine form. Blew is driving an enormous new shining Bentley and has with him three lovely girls in the latest summer frocks. He himself is in white flannels and a straw hat with the pink ribbon of a famous rowing club. It is Saturday afternoon, and the party is on its way to Henley. Blew, however, is apparently not in training. He is smoking a cigar and as he approaches Tomlin he breathes a strong flavor of whiskey.

Mrs. Tomlin, a small, rather shy woman of 60, has also come to the door. She is eager to welcome this rare visitor, a friend of her dear son's. She suspects that his life is dull, that he is sacrificing for her more than she comprehends.

Blew introduces himself, "Major Blew—how do, Mrs. Tomlin," but at once turns to Tomlin and grasps his hand, "My God," he cries, "Dear old Willie—just the same as ever. What a bit of luck to find you. I knew you were somewhere round here and the milkman did the rest. I was sure he'd know—you always liked milk, didn't you?" And he goes into a shout of laughter and slaps Tomlin on the shoulder.

Tomlin is confused. What's this about milk? Then he remembers his diet at the hospital and is confused by his own confusion. He feels himself growing red.

The three ladies, gazing from the car with the most intense appreciation, burst into giggles and one of them cries, "Oh, you Pete, you are a one."

Tomlin now perceives that these ladies are very much made up, probably very far from ladies—also that Blew is swaggering before them at his, Tomlin's, expense. But he says to himself, "After all, we were comrades in arms," and says, "Do come in and have something, all of you."

"Milk," murmurs one of the girls, and the whole three explode into helpless giggles.

"Thanks, old chap," says Blew, "I'd love it, but the fact is we're late already. We had a bit of trouble at the start—argument with a bobby at a crossing—and now, damn it all, I find I've left my wallet on the piano. If you could cash me a check —"

The girls are now once more silent and gaze at the scene with fascinated eyes—the expression of spectators who wait to see a conjuror produce a gold watch from the ear of some country hick selected from the audience.

Tomlin is now growing embarrassed, not so much by Blew's bad manners, as by the mere presence of the man. There is something in Blew that not only disgusts but makes him feel uneasy, as men feel

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when they read of parcel bombs and are suddenly reminded of how much spiteful meanness there is in the world and how easily it gets away with every kind of malicious evil-doing.

Tomlin sees that Blew despises both himself and his mother who stands ignored and equally embarrassed in the doorway, uncertain whether to stay or go away. He wonders how Blew has become a major; he had only been a lieutenant at the end of the war. And he wonders also how he has become a member of Leander; he doubts very much if he knows one end of an oar from the other.

He is very ready to cash a check for £5 to be rid of Major Blew, and he is not greatly surprised when the check is returned to him from his bank marked "Insufficient Funds."

But now, after all these years, having identified this oldest friend, he is not so patient. He answers him in a very cool voice, "Yes, I do remember you now—and also a check you gave me for five pounds."

"No doubt of it, old boy. I don't remember the check but I've always been a good friend to my friends—my real friends. Now look here, my dear old fellow, it's about Florrie; I'm terribly worried about her—"

"Florrie?"

"My daughter Florrie, my only daughter. My only child. Dash it all, you were devoted to Florrie. Don't you remember how she used to sit on your knee to say her prayers?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't. I didn't even know you were married."

"Married? Who said I was married? What are you getting at? And what about that check? What check?" Blew is suddeny truculent. Tomlin remembers that when caught at cheating or lying, he was always extremely noisy and pugnacious.

He says, "I wasn't getting at anything. As you mentioned a daughter, I thought—"

"Well, that's it, old boy," Blew has decided to overlook the offense. "The poor little thing has no one but me—you can understand a father feels a special responsibility in a case like that. And I've done my best, God knows. But a man has his work, he can't be around all the time. And this is it, Willie—Florrie's bolted. This very day as ever is. Gone off with a chap from the village. A complete crook and welsher. But I've just found out where they're going—London. To Paddington by the 9:30. And if you get along now you'll catch 'em easy. You've forty minutes."

"But really, Blew—I never met your Florrie—"

"Wait a minute, old boy. Here's a kid of seventeen been got at by a crook—a real crook. He's a known bigamist. Did time for it under the name of Caffee. He's not only a crook but a stinker—owes money all round, and he drinks. If she goes with him she's finished for life. Imagine a kid like that—as simple as

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a newborn kitten. And all you got to do is go to Paddington and tell Florrie I'm coming up by the night train and will she just wait to see her poor old Daddy before taking the high jump. Just wait a few hours, that's all. For Daddy's sake. And without prejudice, no commitments either side. Just put it to her.

"And if she says no, well, it can't be helped. It'll break my heart but I'll just have to take it. But she won't say no, old boy. You can rely on that. She's a good kid—she loves her old Daddy like he was her mother too—it's just this crook has got round her or she'd never have done such a thing. She'll wait for me and thank you afterwards—thank you all her life. You can't mistake her. She's a light little thing—fair hair, bright blue eyes. Looks younger than she is—just a kid. And she's wearing a long green coat and a green hat. I don't know what he's wearing but he's a regular spiv type with a black mustache, and look here, my dear old chap, if he says a word, all you've got to do is call the police. You won't see him for dust —"

And Tomlin, not wishing to argue with the fellow, answers, "Sorry, but it's too late, I couldn't make the train. I've no car and this is rather a primitive kind of suburb. I doubt if I'd even get a taxi."

"No car and no taxi—that's a pretty thin tale. Do you realize you're the only man in the world who can do this for me—save this poor kid from misery and shame? My God, Willie, if you're really going to quit on me I'll just chuck my hand in, cut my bloody throat. I haven't so much to live for—I've had a hard time in this life—but I still had some faith in friendship. I've said to myself, 'Damn it all, it's a rotten world but there are one or two decent souls left among the stinking dirt; there's Florrie and there's Willie Tomlin.' And now it seems I was wrong there too. Oh, hell, what's the good." And he rings off.

Tomlin sinks back in his chair. He thinks, "I'm well out of that. What a fantastic idea." He relights his pipe, reopens *The Times,* and seeks that evening bliss which has been interrupted.

But it has gone. His nerves are upset. He is deeply uneasy. He is ready to write off 90 per cent of Blew as cant, but he can't help feeling that the other ten is really in distress. After all, he is obviously fond of this daughter of his, and even crooks have hearts. He hears again that cry, "I haven't so much to live for." And he feels a pang; he is more and more shocked by his own selfishness. Here is a fellow creature in the midst of a desperate crisis, and all he does is to bring up against him a dud check, 40 years old.

He is quite astonished at himself. How has he grown so callous, so small-minded?

He wishes now that he knew

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Blew's address. He would ring him up and offer at least to make the attempt. Almost certainly there would be no taxis available, and if there were, it would be too late to intervene at Paddington. But he would like to show good feeling. Also he would like to do something to appease his nagging conscience.

Ten minutes later the phone rings and his hand stretches out automatically. Again the oldest friend's voice, "Hello, hello—Willie? Are you there? I've got you a hired car—it's coming for you now. A thoroughly reliable man. Drives like an ace. Don't forget to wrap up, old fellow. I remember your colds in the old days. And remember—soon as you set eyes on that chap Caffee and mention my name, he'll be off like a pickled rabbit. You've nothing to do but appear and say, 'Colonel Blew's friend—'"

"Colonel?" Tomlin says; and then hurriedly, in case he may be hurting Blew's feelings. "Right you are—I'll be there."

He is actually relieved. His soul is at peace. He feels like an heroic soldier going over the top.

But even before the car arrives, he begins once more to see the difficulties of this undertaking. And they seem rather more formidable than German machine guns.

With a deep sigh he puts on his heaviest overcoat. He reflects that, after all, the whole affair will be over in an hour, and he'll sleep all the better for having done his duty.

Five minutes later he is on his way to Paddington in an ancient car, with all the doors rattling and a strong petrol leak somewhere, driven by a ruffian with a cigarette glued to his lip. Drafts blow in even through the floor, and Tomlin, who is indeed subject, not to colds but to lumbago, wonders where on earth the oldest friend has managed to hire such a miserable vehicle.

At the station the ruffian gets out and says to him, "You looking for Miss Blew?"

"Why, yes, I was. Do you know her?"

"From a baby. *And* her guv'nor. Used to drive for him. Did the Derby with him five years running—as an amateur—down the course to beat the book—needs a quick getaway at times. Too quick for *my* liver and lights. Got a butt?"

Tomlin gives him a cigarette, he lights it with a thoughtful air, humps his shoulders, and says, "A sporty boy, you might say."

In the next five minutes, while they wait for the train, which is late, he breaks the silence only once with a loud and peculiar laugh, something between a crow and a snort, and throws the cigarette, with some violence, across the platform onto the down line.

Tomlin offers him another cigarette from his pack; he makes a slight movement of his forefinger, the sketch of a salute, and takes the pack.

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The train comes in, the ruffian plants himself by the exit gate, Tomlin hovers in the background with a wild idea—an idea he knows to be impossible—of losing himself in the crowd and going home by the underground. But there is no crowd. Only about 30 or 40 people come from the long train and at once he sees the ruffian approaching a couple walking rapidly down the platform.

The girl is hanging on the man's arm; the man is carrying a large brown suitcase. She is a very stout girl with a large snub nose, red cheeks, and small green eyes. She appears about 30. The man is a large and heavy thug with a purple face and a black mustache.

Tomlin, seeing nothing for it, goes up to the girl and says politely, "I beg your pardon. Miss Blew, I believe. I had a phone call from your father."

The man answers for the girl, "Who the devil are you?"

"Colonel Blew phoned me and asked me to meet his daughter."

"I asked who the hell are you? What right have you to speak for Colonel Blew?"

"My name is Tomlin. I tell you Colonel Blew requested me to speak for him, as a friend."

The girl says, "Never heard of you."

The man makes as if to push Tomlin aside, "Here, you clear out."

Tomlin ignores him in a dignified manner and addresses the girl.

"Your father asks me to say that he is coming to town tonight and will see you tomorrow morning. He begs you most earnestly to take no irrevocable step until then."

"I don't believe a word of it," the girl cries. "Irrevocable step. What stuff. Daddy don't talk like that. What the bloody hell, anyhow. I know your sort—pestering respectable girls at railway stations."

And the man pushes up against Tomlin saying through his teeth, "Are you getting out or aren't you?"

Tomlin, determined not to have trouble, ignores this provocation and appeals again to the girl, "You must have heard of me—Willie Tomlin. Your father's friend—his oldest friend."

Caffee pushes Tomlin a yard, "Here, what's your game? Do you want me to dot you one?"

Tomlin, more and more irritated by the idea that he has been let in by Blew for this ridiculous affair simply because he is Tomlin, pushes back vigorously and says, "Come now, don't be silly."

"Silly—we'll see who's silly."

"We don't want the police, I imagine."

"The police," bawls the other. "What you mean about the police?" and he tramps heavily on Tomlin's foot with his heel.

Tomlin loses his temper, loses it suddenly and completely. His whole infuriated soul demands why these spivs and crooks should make a fool of him and despise him at

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the same time, simply because he has some decency. He shouts at the top of his voice, "What do I mean, Mr. Caffee? You ought to know that better than I do. I haven't a record."

"A record? What you mean, record?" He aims a blow. Tomlin thinks, "I'll show 'em who's a sheep," hits him flush on the nose and gets a punch in the ear. The girl shrieks, porters and a station policeman come running up and tear the pair apart. Caffee is bleeding from the nose and claims justice. Miss Blew never stops swearing that Tomlin has started the whole thing and struck the first blow.

Tomlin is arrested. But he declares that Caffee is abducting this child, daughter of his oldest friend; he has reason to suppose that he is a bigamist. And the two men are taken to the cells, while Miss Blew shouts after them that they are beasts, brutes, and crooks, she never wants to see either of them again.

Next morning Tomlin, bailed out by a friend, goes home and finds the girl in possession. The ruffian has driven her to his address. She has spent most of the night in hysterics and is now drinking brandy to strengthen her nerves before getting up.

But she complains that if she gets up now she will not be able to eat—that scoundrel Tomlin has wrecked her health as well as her life.

Tomlin telephones for Blew and he arrives at three. He enters bellowing Tomlin's name and slaps him on the back so hard that he makes him stagger.

He is now an extremely bloated person with a face mottled like newcut brawn, a lilac nose, and little bloodshot eyes. He is dressed in an old tweed coat, with leather elbows, and extremely tight and dirty twill trousers. When he causes Tomlin to stagger he also staggers, shouting with laughter. He is in the highest spirits. He has been celebrating on the way and is in a fine glow of triumph. He claims full credit for the masterly scheme as carried out by Tomlin.

"Didn't I tell you it would be as easy as a Derby mug. I knew that rotten crook had no guts. You'll see, we'll hear no more from him." And he adds with deep satisfaction, "That'll teach him to welsh on the old Colonel."

Then he borrows a pound to pay his taxi, takes two more double whiskies, and goes upstairs to see his little darling. Immediately the door closes behind him a noise is heard like a dogfight between a mastiff at its last wind and half a dozen small neurotic terriers. The terriers yap, scream, howl without cease; the mastiff roars, moans, and gasps.

Finally Colonel Blew descends, rather redder and more swollen than before, and exclaims to Tomlin, "You've made a proper mess of things, haven't you?" falls in a chair and asks for a whiskey, which he takes neat.

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"A proper bloody muckup," he says. "Poor Florrie—that poor child. Well, I suppose you didn't think. You're not a family man; you dodged out on all that too. How could you know how a girl feels in a jam like this—all her life's happiness down the plug. And as for me, as for my feelings—but no one ever thinks of this poor old soldier. I'd be a fool to expect it. My trouble is I wasn't born your sort, with insides like a fish and no sense of responsibility. What do you care if she's been crying her eyes out all night, poor little lamb? But all I can say is, keep away from her if you value your bits and pieces; she's all out to cut you off with a blunt bread knife."

He catches his breath, takes another gulp of whiskey, throws up his arms and cries, "Good God in Heaven, man, what got into you last night?"

"When—how—"

"Hitting that chap and calling names. You must have been mad unless you were tight. But I might have expected it. It's always the same with you half-alive chaps that stand from under. You're so keen on watching out for a drop of rain that you fall down the first open manhole."

"You told me he'd been in jail."

"That wasn't any reason to tell *him* so. That's libel, criminal libel. Don't you know your law? And what's more, old boy, it seems he didn't exactly do time, neither."

"You said he was a bigamist."

"And so he was," the Colonel shouts, "So he was—in the eyes of God. But it seems he didn't marry the girls—neither of 'em. And as for jail, he should have got there years ago but Florrie swears he's not actually been inside. I'm sorry, old boy, but how did I know you'd rush in like that without smelling out the ground? And now I really don't see how you're going to come off without a pretty stiff sentence. Criminal libel is a serious thing and so it ought to be. You can't go calling chaps crooks all over the place—not in England, and quite right, too. No, not even if they *are* crooks, as you ought to know. In England, the public has protection. Of course, you could go and apologize, but the question is, would he take it? Why should he? He holds all the aces and then some."

"You seem to have changed your ideas about Mr. Caffee."

"Bill Caffee! There you've got me wrong. I always liked Bill; we've been in several little things together. He has a wonderful eye for a horse, win or lose. A fine chap. All I worried about was would he make a suitable husband for my Florrie. Would he be able to meet his responsibilities and support her in the way she's been accustomed. And I admit I doubted it, old boy. But it seems he's just brought off a double at Leicester. He's prepared to pay off all debts, debts of honor anyhow, and offer her quite a nice little

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home. And as for being suitable, well, it seems he's been suiting her already. The sooner they get hitched the better; it's urgent."

And within the next ten days Tomlin, having been censured and fined in court for an unprovoked assault on an innocent citizen, thinks himself lucky to escape further action for criminal slander by the humblest apologies to Caffee and £100 damages.

The Blews then forgive him. Blew borrows £100 pounds to pay for the wedding, and Caffee another £100 for the honeymoon. Miss Blew suggests that a silver tea service would be appropriate as a present, and, in fact, deserved, since Tomlin has so nearly wrecked her happiness. He compromises with an electric kettle, and is not asked to the wedding at a register office or the party afterward. But Mrs. Caffee thanks him from Monte Carlo for the kettle, which she spells *kettel,* and sends a formal card for a flat warming after the honeymoon, on the third of September, in a suburb 40 miles away—the kind of invitation that expects immediate rejection. Tomlin answers with polite regrets that in September he will be away on holidays; and he adds that he always takes his holiday in September, after the crowds, for peace and quiet.

He writes this twice in draft and leaves it out again. He feels that it may sound like a reproach, even a dig. But finally he says, "Damn it all, why be so sheepish? If they take it wrong, let 'em; they deserve it. And after all, it does show why I can't come to the party, that I'm not just dodging their damn party." And he posts the letter, with dig.

There is no retort from the young couple. If they have understood his note as a dig they have taken it lying down. And he gets a certain moral satisfaction from his dig; at least, he has not let those undisciplined savages get away with everything. He has vindicated morality and now he can really enjoy his peace again. He has paid heavily for it.

And he doesn't intend to take any more risks. On the day, five weeks later, when he is to leave for his annual fortnight at Brighton, he tells his housekeeper when she brings his morning tea to give no one his address, not even if he says he's a particular friend.

Suddenly there is the noise of a taxi at the gate, a loud and prolonged ring at the door. The housekeeper pulls an astonished face and goes downstairs. A moment later Mrs. Caffee charges into the room and cries, "Thank God, you've not gone yet."

She throws herself on Tomlin's chest, conveying to him a strong smell of gin. "That brute," she cries, "That liar and crook, he hadn't any flat, he hadn't any money, he hadn't any job—and he hit me. I've left him forever. I told him so. I said, 'You think you can treat me how

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you like because I've no proper home and nowhere to go. But you've forgotten Willie.'"

Tomlin, appalled, mutters, "Your father—"

"Oh, Daddy—you know what Daddy is. You saw him. I phoned him last night and he told me to go to hell. All he wanted was Bill to pay him that ten quid. But I never expected anything from Daddy and I never got it either. Daddy's a hog. Besides, I shouldn't wonder if he wasn't my daddy at all. Mum only picked on him because he was tight—"

The housekeeper comes in with a still longer face, "Excuse me, sir, it's the taxi man; he wants his money."

"Oh, yes, I forgot," says Mrs. Caffee, "I haven't any money."

Tomlin, in dressing gown, goes down to pay the taxi man. As he passes his spare bedroom he hears a small baby crying. He stops in surprise and looks in. The baby, a very wet and dirty one, is lying on the silk eiderdown, lately re-covered. Seeing Tomlin, it screams still louder.

And suddenly Tomlin is again embraced. Again he gets that breath of gin. "Yes, it's little Peter. What else could I do—and I knew you wouldn't mind—you're so good—" And she sobs loudly, "A true friend —my only friend in the whole world. Just while I look around—just for the next day or two—"

But six months later she is still looking around. Tomlin has appealed to Blew but the Colonel has disappeared into Eire after some trouble about a horse that has changed its color from all black to brown, with three white socks, in a thunderstorm immediately after winning a race. All he has had from him is the bill from the ruffian for the drive to Paddington and back, forwarded with the note, "Why have you kept this poor chap waiting for his money? You're lucky he didn't sue."

There seems nowhere in the whole world for Mrs. Caffee and little Peter to go except the Institution or the streets. And though she seems likely to do well on the streets, though she knows already a great many men who call on her at odd hours to share Tomlin's whiskey, Tomlin can't make up his mind actually to throw her out. He knows that if he did so, he would never have another hour of peace.

The housekeeper has left, he keeps with difficulty an occasional charwoman, the house is filthy, the bills are awful. Tomlin has aged ten years; he takes pills before and after every meal. And he hasn't even the satisfaction of a good opinion of himself. For he has quite failed to like Mrs. Caffee.

He doesn't even take to the baby, which grows more and more like Caffee every day, even to the impudent loudness of its voice. What depresses him most is the feeling that the whole thing is ridiculous, that it wouldn't have happened to

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anyone else, and that anyone else would know how to put an end to it.

But one afternoon when Tomlin, sunk in such gloomy thoughts, is waiting for tea, already half an hour late, a taxi stops at the door. Tomlin is sitting in the windw to put himself as far as possible from Florrie, who, having at last come downstairs, is about to ring the bell. For Florrie demanded all the privileges of the house mistress, and Tomlin found it advisable to give Florrie exactly what she wanted. She was an expert in making life intolerable for anyone who did not.

From the taxi emerges a little old man in a blue suit and bowler, who looks like a bank manager or perhaps a retired sea captain. Tomlin is gazing at him in dull surprise, wondering what he can want, when he hears a strange exclamation behind him and looks around. Florrie is up on her feet and is also looking out of the window. Her eyes are jumping out of her head, her cheeks are blue-white, her mouth has sagged open. Tomlin has never seen anyone so completely and utterly terrified. For a moment she does not move, probably cannot, only the slack mouth twists as if she were going to scream.

But she does not make a sound. She shifts her gaze to Tomlin, puts a shaky finger to her lips as if to implore, "Not a word," and just as the front doorbell rings, she tiptoes out of the room.

A moment later the char flings open the sitting-room door and flaps away back to the kitchen. She is a scrubwoman by nature and resents answering bells.

The little old man walks in, hat in hand, and presents himself, "Mr. Smith."

In address and manner he is more like a captain than a banker. His glance seems to say, not "What sort of an account are you?" but "What sort of a man have we here?"

"I don't think I—" Tomlin stammers. Florrie's mysterious panic, her last imploring gesture, have thrown him in confusion. Here is some kind of crisis and he isn't used to sudden crises.

"No, you don't know me," says Mr. Smith, "and I don't know you, but I'm not selling anything and I shan't keep you a moment. I believe you know a friend of mine called Blew, one of my oldest friends. I hear his daughter Florrie has been staying with you quite recently."

"Yes."

"Is she here now?"

"I'm sorry but she's—"

"Do you know her present address?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm afraid—"

"Well then Blew's address. He's the man I want."

"I'm sorry but I think—"

"No idea where he is?" Mr. Smith keeps his little blue eyes fixed all the time on Tomlin's face with an unwinking stare which would have been rude in a detective examining a suspected murderer.

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This look is as disconcerting to Tomlin as that of a maniac whose whole way of thought is alien. But Mr. Smith has an even more alarming habit. His mouth, which is absurdly small, a mere pucker under his rather thick nose, is in perpetual motion. After each of Tomlin's remarks he will chew for several moments as if tasting the flavor, and after each of his own he will purse up his lips as if to whistle. He purses them up now and pushes them forward till they resemble the sucker on an octopus.

Once Tomlin has caught sight of his mouth he can't look anywhere else. Neither can he give any real attention to the man's questions. There is a kind of block in his mind.

He is not in the least afraid of this man. He is only confused before him as in the presence of something incomprehensible. Just as in face of his elder brother's delight in humiliating him he had felt more discomfort than resentment—a kind of sick bewilderment at such a phenomenon, and was ready to do anything to put an end to it—so now he does not know how to deal with a creature so mysterious and evil to his feeling. He is anxious only to get him away or to get away from him.

"Well," he stammers at last, "I did have a letter."

"Where from?"

"I—I rather think it was Eire."

"Eire," Mr. Smith is suddenly interested. His eyebrows rise high into his bulging forehead, "What address?"

"He didn't give an address but the stamp was Eire."

"What postmark?"

Tomlin, gazing at the man's mouth, actually does not take account of this question till Mr. Smith, raising his voice, as if to a deaf person, barks, "Postmark?"

"Postmark—oh, the postmark—I don't think I noticed the postmark."

"Got the envelope?"

"No."

Mr. Smith whistles silently and takes a last hard look at Tomlin. His expression is not so much contemptuous as inquiring. He seems to be asking himself, "What is this thing, this object?"

Then he dismisses him with a chew. He is once more animated.

"Eire—so that's the idea, is it. I hadn't thought of that one." He adds to Tomlin, "Thanks a lot, Mister—" and makes off to his taxi. Tomlin falls into a chair.

"I wonder," he thinks, "what goes on inside that chap." He gives a deep sigh and reflects, "At least, I didn't put him on poor Florrie's track."

The char appears in great indignation which she aims at Tomlin. She is indignant with everything and everyone, but especially Tomlin. "What have you done with the baby?"

"What baby?"

"Why, *the* baby," bawls the char,

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who has a certain feeling for Florrie's baby because Florrie gives her gin and complains to her of Tomlin. "It was in the garden, but the pram's empty."

And in fact, not only the baby but Florrie herself has disappeared. The only news of them to be had is from the milkman who has seen Florrie, hatless and coatless, with the baby, running down the back lane. "I asked her if anything was wrong, but she didn't stop," the milkman says.

That is two years ago, and Tomlin has heard no more of Florrie.

And as of an evening, alone in his shining house, beautifully kept by one of those excellent housekeepers always available to house-proud bachelors of quiet habits, Tomlin toasts his muffins and unfolds his *Times,* he feels a gratitude beyond expression. At last he admits it to himself, "No doubt about it, I'm a sheep, a born sheep. And what luck that is, what marvelous luck."

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RINK

1001st Precinct Mystery

A Police Procedural Novel

by RON GOULART

Chapter One

WINDOWS. ALL OVER MEGALOPOlis City there were windows. Windows looking out on the pageant of life in a city of several million diverse people. Windows of glass, like eyes. Windows in tall buildings and short buildings. Windows that give onto visions of vast greenery and sylvan peace. Windows that offer glimpses of stately homes. Windows that look out on squalor and penal code violations. Windows.

Lieutenant Terse wished they had a window in the squad room at the 1001st Precinct. But they didn't. The station house had been built during one of the periods of civic corruption and the contractor had hedged. Instead of windows the squad room had Navy surplus portholes. It was quiet in the stale squad room now. It often was at 3 A.M. The phone at his elbow jangled Lieutenant Terse out of a doze —a doze and thoughts of Hazel and the twins and young Brucie and Ella and the dog, Nils.

"Terse," he spoke into the instrument.

"Nunlist, Loot," said one of his detectives. "Out on East 78th Street."

It bothered Terse sometimes that Megalopolis City had the same street names as New York City. He'd learned to work with it. "Yeah?" he barked inquiringly. He was a big gruff man, graying, who wore size 42 underwear.

"Looks like we got a 17 out here."

"A what?"

"Code 17, Loot. Bad one."

They'd changed the code again this month and it took Terse a moment to react. "Give me a hint."

"Well," said Nunlist, "there are a lot of people all sprawled on the floor."

"Are they alive?"

"No, Loot."

"It's a murder. Right?"

"Six murders," said the accurate Nunlist.

"Who's working this with you?"

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"Grannis and me, Loot."

"Where's Wickler?"

"He and Doob are on Burglary."

"Which? Are they stopping it or doing it?"

"Stopping. Duffin's looting tonight."

Terse had twenty-six detectives working under him and sometimes he lost track. But he was a good cop. "Anybody else around?"

"Fresca's here."

"Fresca? It's his day off."

"He's here ice skating."

"What's he doing ice skating at the scene of a crime?"

"It's an ice rink, Loot, where the murders happened."

"Who are the victims? Any IDs on them?"

"Any what?"

"IDs. Identifications."

"Oh, we know who they all are."

"Well, who are they?"

"This is going to strike you as odd, Loot. The six victims happen to be the members on the Civilian Police Review Board."

This was a bad break. The Board had been riding Lieutenant Terse hard lately for alleged brutality. He'd tried to tell them all brutality was limited to his Brutality Squad but hadn't made much headway. "The papers are going to breathe down our necks on this, Nunlist."

"*The Times* and *The News* already are. Two of their crime reporters were here practicing figure skating when the murders happened."

"What have you got on the killer?"

"We haven't asked anybody about that yet, Loot. But we intend to."

Nunlist would ask. He was a good, thorough man. "Stay there, Nunlist. I'll be over."

"You want us to take pictures and fingerprints and that stuff?"

"Might as well."

"I'll get the camera back from Fresca. He's taking some pictures of a girl doing figure eights."

Terse grunted and pronged the black instrument.

Three fifteen in the morning. He was already nine hours late for dinner. Hazel would be at the limit of her patience. No time to call her now. This was a bad one, a big one.

Chapter Two

Detective Malley scratched his Harvard-educated head and looked at the brownstone apartment building. The building had a lot of windows. It was a hot day today, a scorcher. Malley climbed up the steps and pushed at the bell that went with the lodgings of Status M. Pinney.

Pinney lived on the third floor. He was a wide nervous man. By trade he was an egg candler. "Yes, officer?"

"You fainted at the skating rink last night, Mr. Pinney," Malley told him. "We want your account of what happened."

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Pinney invited him in. The room was full of eggs. "You're kind of short for a cop, officer."

"Five foot one," admitted Malley.

"I thought cops had to be five foot eight."

"Usually I wear built-up shoes," said the banty detective. "But I couldn't get my ice skates unstrapped and I had to leave my shoes at the rink."

"I suppose you want a description of that killer, huh?"

"It'll help."

"You mind if I candle eggs while we talk? I'm a week behind my schedule."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why are you a week behind?"

"I faint a lot."

Malley made a note of that in the little book he kept to write things in. "What did the killer look like, Mr. Pinney?" Malley was good at asking questions, even though he was short.

"Well, officer. He was bald. He had an oval head. He looked something like an egg."

"Now, just a minute, Mr. Pinney," said Malley. "You sure you're not just letting your profession get the best of your judgment?"

"No. He looked like a speckled egg. Grade AA."

Murderer resembled egg, wrote Malley in the book. He was later to find out that most of the other witnesses described the killer as being a man with a red beard. That was how it went sometimes with witnesses.

Just as Malley was going out the door the phone rang and Pinney said it was for Malley.

"Malley, 1001st, speaking."

"This is Terse. Listen, I've got one of those hunches." Terse's hunches were famous. "How many eggs does that guy Pinney have there?"

"A lot, Lieutenant."

"Exactly how many?"

"I don't know."

"Find out," said Terse, pronging his instrument.

"May I count your eggs, Mr. Pinney?" asked Malley as he replaced his end of the phone in its cradle.

Chapter Three

Detective Fresca was mad. He was standing on East 86th Street and shouting at Detective Doob. "That's not professional, Doob."

Doob looked sheepish. He gave the sticker one last pat and stepped back from the bumper of the police car. "I like to dabble with public relations."

"It's not subtle when you put a *Support Your Local Police* decal on the bumper of a police car."

Doob shrugged.

Fresca said, "Now let's go in and talk to this suspect."

"I gave Iris a bicycle for her

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birthday and put a sticker on the seat. She didn't complain."

"Some dumb typist you're engaged to is not like a squad car."

They rode up in the elevator in silence. It had a window.

John Wayne Fiddyment was a man with a red beard. There was a fuzzy towel wrapped around his head. "I'm inhaling steam, officers," he said, letting them in.

"A steam addict," muttered Doob as they came into the palatial suite.

"For my bronchitis."

"Mr. Fiddyment," began Fresca, "we'd like to ask you a few questions."

"Splendid," said the big man. He strode over and placed himself in a seated position behind a large metallic desk. Upon it was a typewriter.

"Where were you last evening at two thirty A.M.?" Fresca asked the bearded man.

Doob went over to the steam inhalator and sniffed.

"Right here at the old typewritter," said Fiddyment.

Fresca came over and studied the machine. He got out the little tablet he kept to write things in. "I'll make some notes." For future identification purposes Fresca copied down the letters on the typewriter keys. They were: qwertyuiop asdfghjkl zxcvbnm.

"I'm an author of mystery novels," Fiddyment explained. "Why do you want to question me?"

"I'll be frank," said Fresca. "We went through our records and got out the names of all the red-bearded killers in The City. You're one of them."

Fiddyment sighed. "I can never seem to live that down. That murder was way back in 1946 and it still haunts me."

"What sort of detective stories you write?" asked Doob, wiping steam off his chin.

"Police procedural stuff," said Fiddyment. "Under the pen name of William Somerset Smash."

"You mean you're the guy who writes those stories about the 887th Precinct? With those great one word titles like *Foot* and *Hat* and *Slug?*" asked Doob.

"The same."

"Getting back to these murders," said Fresca, who never read mysteries. "Have you been up to your old tricks, Mr. Fiddyment?"

"I don't even know what murders you're talking about. Do these alleged crimes have my MO?"

"Your what?"

"MO. *Modus operandi.* Method of operation, officer."

"He uses that in all his books," Doob pointed out.

"Well," said Fresca. "The murders did happen at a skating rink. Same as the killing you pulled in the forties."

"A coincidence. An unfortunate coincidence I assure you," said Fiddyment, removing the towel.

"The victims were shot with a

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.45. What kind of gun do you have?" asked Fresca.

"A .44," said the author.

"That's close," said Doob.

Suddenly Fresca got a hunch. His hunches were almost as famous as Lieutenant Terse's. "Let's go."

In the elevator he told the curious Doob, "I have got a hunch Fiddyment didn't do it."

"Who did it then?"

"That hunch I haven't got yet."

Chapter Four

Life in a giant city never stops for death. Business goes on. Windows are washed, people eat. In the 1001st squad room Lieutenant Terse was having a hunch. Unfortunately it was about who was going to win the World Series and it didn't move his case along any. The boys at City Hall were breathing down his neck on this one. It was rough.

In the Pinney apartment Malley was counting eggs. "Six hundred and eighty-four," he said in a low voice. "That does it."

"Don't you want to count the ones in the bedroom?"

Malley sighed.

Out at a well-known amusement park Fresca was taking his lovely girl friend, Vicky Hoffsomer, for a roller coaster ride. Suddenly he jumped up and told the roller coaster operator to stop.

"I've got the pattern," Fresca told the startled Vicky. "I'll have to leave you here."

"Why did I fall head over heels in love with a cop?" Vicky goodnaturedly asked herself in her sultry voice.

Fresca climbed down the roller coaster trestles in a hurry.

Chapter Five

Grannis, Wickler, and Duffin were lounging around the squad room, taking each other's fingerprints for the fun of it.

"Clowns," said Lieutenant Terse, striding in and unpronging his black phone. "Jellicoe," he told the operator, "get me Malley at that egg guy's place."

"Malley, 1001st," came a voice finally.

"There are two thousand and three eggs. Right?"

"I don't know"

"You don't know?"

"Your call made me lose count."

"Get back to it."

Then came one of those lucky breaks that happen now and then just when all your digging and patient questioning and bludgeoning don't seem to be leading you anywhere. It's like somebody opening a window in a stuffy room and letting in air.

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A plump middle-aged woman came into the squad room and said, "I'm Mrs. Shelly Sherbourne. I want to confess some murders." She took a false red beard from her purse and flourished it.

Terse tensed. This could be it. "What murders exactly?" he asked craftily.

"Those fellows at the ice rink."

Grannis couldn't help blurting out. "You knocked off the whole six."

"They led me astray and smirched my honor," she said.

"The entire Civilian Police Review Board led you astray?" asked Terse.

"I didn't know that's who they were. They told me they were an out-of-town barber shop quartet."

"Six men in a quartet?"

"See how easily fooled I was," said Mrs Sherbourne. Then she gave way to tears.

After they'd taken a confession and led Mrs. Sherbourne away Terse sat in his battered swivel chair. "I had a hunch we'd crack this one."

Duffin grinned. "The Loot and his hunches. He never misses."

Fresca came dashing in, out of breath. "I've got it all figured out."

"Too late," announced Terse. "Case is closed."

They told Fresca what had happened. Then Fresca, cursing good-naturedly, told them his theory.

At its end Terse said, "That's a good solution, Fresca. Save it. We're bound to get a case it's going to fit."

The phone jangled and Terse unpronged it. It was Malley. "Listen, Lieutenant," he said. "This guy's renting a loft down in the Village and it's full of eggs too. You want those counted?"

"Case is closed," said Terse.

"What about your egg hunch?"

"Sometimes I get a bum one."

Everybody in the squad room laughed. That was the way things went sometimes.

Terse hung up. "You guys hold down things here." He'd been at it for thirty-seven hours. "Don't play with the guns, stay out of the fingerprint stuff, and don't let Doob paste up any more of those stickers." He moved toward the door.

"Where you going, Loot?" asked Grannis.

"Going home and look out the window," said Terse, strolling out into the turmoil of the busy metropolis.

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Q.B.I.: QUEEN'S BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

All of us would like to have a rich uncle from Australia—but a rich uncle from Australia can turn out to be an altogether mixed blessing . . . a classic situation—with a difference . . .

LAST WORD DEPT.: *Uncle from Australia*

by ELLERY QUEEN

"How did you happen to call me, Mr. Hall?" asked Ellery. He had been annoyed at first, because it was half-past ten and he was about to bed down with his favorite book, the dictionary, when his phone rang.

"The security hofficer at the 'otel 'ere gave it to me," said the man on the line. His salty cockney accent savored of London, but the man said he was from Australia.

"What's your problem?"

It turned out that Herbert Peachtree Hall was not merely from Australia, he was somebody's uncle from Australia. Uncles from Australia were graybeard standards of the mystery story, and here was one, if not exactly in the flesh, at least in the voice. So Ellery's ears began to itch.

It appeared that Mr. Hall was all of three somebodies' uncle from Australia, a niece and two nephews. A migrant from England of thirty years' exile, Hall said he had made his pile on the nether continent, liquidated it, and was now prepared—ah, that classic tradition!—to give it all away in a will. The young niece and the two young nephews being his only kin (if he had any kith, they were apparently undeserving of his largess), and all three being New York residents, Hall had journeyed to the United States to make their acquaintance and decide which of them deserved to be his heir. Their names were Millicent, Preston, and James, and they were all Halls, being the children of his only brother, deceased.

Ever the voice of caution, Ellery asked, "Why don't you simply divide your estate among the three?"

"Because I don't want to," said Hall, which seemed a reasonable reason. He had a horror, it seemed, of cutting up capital into bits and pieces.

He had spent two months getting to know Millicent, Preston, and James; and this evening he had invited them to dinner to announce the great decision.

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"I told 'em, 'Old 'erbert,' I says, 'old 'erbert 'as taken a fancy to one of you. No 'ard feelings, you hunderstand, boys, but it's Millie gets my money. I've signed a will naming 'er my heir." Preston and James had taken his pronouncement with what Hall said he considered ruddy good sportsmanship, and they had even toasted their sister Millie's good fortune in champagne.

But after the departure of the trio, back in his hotel room, the uncle from Australia had afterthoughts.

"I never 'ad trouble making money, Mr. Queen, but maybe by giving it away I'm asking for some. I'm sixty, you know, but the doctors tell me I'm fit as one of your dollars—can live another fifteen years. Suppose Millie decides she won't wait that long?"

"Then make another will," said Ellery, "restoring the *status quo ante*."

"Mightn't be fair to the girl," protested Hall. "I 'aven't real grounds for suspicion, Mr. Queen. That's why I want the services of a hinvestigator, to muck through Millie's life, find out if she's the sort to bash in 'er poor rich uncle's 'ead. Can you come 'ere right now, so I can tell you what I know about 'er?"

"Tonight? That seems hardly necessary! Won't tomorrow morning do, Mr. Hall?"

"Tomorrow morning," said Herbert Peachtree Hall stubbornly, "could be too late."

So for some reason obscure to him—although his ears were itching like mad—Ellery decided to humor the Australian. The hour of 11 p.m. plus six minutes found him outside Hall's suite in the midtown hotel, knocking. His knock went unanswered. Whereupon Ellery tried the door, found it opened to his hand, and walked in.

And there was a bone-thin little man with a white thatch and a bush tan stretched out on the carpet, face down, with a brassy-looking Oriental paperknife in his back.

Ellery leaped for the phone, told the hotel operator to send up the house doctor and call the police, and got down on one knee beside the prone figure. He had seen an eyelid flicker.

"Mr. Hall!" he said urgently. "Who did it? Which one?"

The already cyanosed lips trembled. At first nothing came out, but then Ellery heard, quite distinctly, one word.

"Hall," the dying man whispered.

"Hall? Which Hall? Millie? One of your nephews? Mr. Hall, you have to tell me—"

But Mr. Hall was not telling anything more to anybody. The man from down under was down, down under, and Ellery knew he was not going to come up again, ever.

The following day Ellery was an inquisitive audience of one in his

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father's office at police headquarters. The director was, of course, Inspector Queen; the cast were the three Halls—Millicent, Preston, and James. The banty Inspector put them through their paces peevishly.

"All your uncle was able to get out before he died," snapped the Inspector, "was the name Hall, which tells us it was one of you, but not which one.

"This is an off-beat case, God help me," the old man went on. "Murders have three ingredients—motive, means, opportunity. You three match up to them pretty remarkably. Motive? Only one of you benefits from Herbert P. Hall's death—and that's you, Miss Hall."

Millicent Hall had a large bottom, and a large face with a large nose in the middle of it. She was plain enough, Ellery concluded, to have grasped at the nettle murder in order to achieve that luscious legacy.

"I didn't kill him," the girl protested.

"So say they all, Miss Hall. Means? Well, there are no prints on the knife that did the job—because of the chasework on the handle and blade—but it's an unusual piece, and establishing its ownership has been a cinch. Mr. Preston Hall, the knife that killed your uncle belongs to you."

"Belonged to me," coughed Preston Hall, a long lean shipping clerk with the fangs of a famished ocelot. "I presented it to Uncle Herbert just last week. Father left it to me, and I thought Uncle Herbert might like to have a memento of his only brother. He actually cried when I gave it to him."

"I'm touched," snarled the Inspector. "Opportunity? One of you was actually seen and identified loitering about the hotel last night after the dinner party broke up—and that was you, James Hall."

James Hall was a bibulous fellow, full of spirits of both sorts; he worked, when one of the spirits moved him, in the sports department of a tabloid.

"Sure it was me," James Hall laughed. "Hell, I stayed around to have a few belts, that's all, before tootling on home. Does that mean I am the big bad slayer?"

"This is like coming down the stretch in a three-horse race," complained Inspector Queen. "Millicent Hall is leading on motive—though I'd like to point out that you, Preston, or you, James, could have knocked the old boy over to teach him a lesson for not leaving his money to *you*. Preston's leading on means; I have only your uncorroborated word that you gave the letter knife to Herbert Hall; what I *do* know is that its yours. Though, again, even if you did give Hall the knife, you, Millie, or you, James, could have used it in that hotel room. And James, you're leading on opportunity—though your brother or sister could have easily

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sneaked up to your uncle's room without being seen. Ellery, what are you sitting there like a dummy for?"

"I'm thinking," said Ellery, looking thoughtful.

"And have you thought out," asked his father acidly, "which one of the Halls their uncle meant when he said 'Hall' killed him? Do you see a glimmer?"

"Oh, more than a glimmer, dad," Ellery said. "I see it all."

CHALLENGE TO THE READER
Who killed Uncle Herbert from Australia? And how did Ellery know?

"Old 'erbert was right, dad," Ellery said. "Millie, drooling over the prospect of all those Australian goodies, couldn't wait for her uncle to die naturally. But she hadn't the nerve to murder him by herself—did you, Miss Hall? So you held out the bait of a three-way split to your brothers, and they willingly joined you in the plot. Safety in numbers, and all that. Right?"

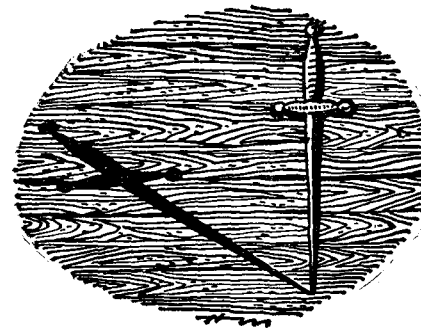
The three Halls had grown very still indeed.

"It's always disastrous," Ellery said sadly, "trying to be clever in a murder. The plan was to confuse the issue and baffle the police—one of you being tied to motive, another to the weapon, the third to opportunity. It was all calculated to water down suspicion—spread it around."

"We don't know what you're talking about," said the drinking Hall, quite soberly; and his brother and sister nodded at once.

The Inspector was troubled. "But how do you know, Ellery?"

"Because Herbert Hall was a Cockney. He dropped his aitches; in certain key words beginning with a vowel, he also added the cockney aitch. Well, what did he say when I asked him which one of the three had stabbed him? He said, 'Hall.' I didn't realize till just now that he wasn't saying 'Hall'—*he was adding an aitch*. What he really said was 'all'—all three of them murdered him!"



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Here is one of the most unusual "Western-crime" stories you have ever read. There are "cowboys" in it, complete with spurs and chaps and wide-brimmed hats, with a rodeo and steer roping and bronco riding, and with "rustlers" and quick draws and a city boy who was called Tex Jones although his real name was Gordon Oneal the Second—but as we said, podner, it's a mighty different sort of Western yarn . . .

POOR LITTLE RICH KID

by THOMAS WALSH

OF COURSE WHEN JOHNNY GOT sick just two hours before train time I was the one to stay with him, because I was the fellow that always got stuck. Billy Carson said it was what he carried me for—little jobs like that—and I guess he was right, because the only horses I'd be comfortable on now were the kind that went up and down on a merry-go-round. I was what you might call odd-job man with Carson's Rodeo—odd jobs meaning anything no one else wanted to do; and taking care of that Johnny wasn't so odd as it was crazy.

But that one time he behaved pretty well, mostly because he didn't have a chance to do anything else. It turned out that he didn't have pneumonia after all, but they kept him in the hospital for a week anyway; so for seven nights I had nothing to do but hang around the hotel and play poker with a bunch of Southern boys. By the time Johnny got out I must have paid off three mortgages, and if they hadn't had low-fare night trains running out at twelve we'd have had to walk. As it was, I just had enough left to make two tickets, with something like eighty cents left over.

It wasn't a nice ride—day coaches and a lot of smoking and a baby crying somewhere—but it wasn't very long. I dozed a little bit and tried to read, and across the aisle a kid sitting with a big blond man eyed us nearly all the way. We had on wide-brim hats and high-heel boots, and you could tell that kid thought we were real cowhands. Rustlers, maybe, or Dick Strong and Jack Frank, tight-lipped, soft-voiced gunmen who cleaned out the lawless cattle towns. But he was a quiet kid, not fresh like some, just watching us when he thought we weren't looking.

We got in to our stop around five in the morning, and he and the blond man left the car just ahead of us. We were the only ones that did

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leave the train, and as we started back from the day coaches to the stairs, the platform looked long and empty under the strung-out lights. There weren't even any porters—just these two ahead of us and the wind whining all around, so that you couldn't even hear their steps. It was March and still plenty cold; and before we reached the stairs at the other end of the platform that wind was cutting right through my gloves until my fingers were stiff as wagon spokes.

That must have affected the kid too, because when he and the blond man were halfway up the steps he dropped the bag he was carrying, and it rolled down to the bottom. The blond man growled something and waited until the kid had gone back and picked it up; then when he reached him again he slapped out and caught the kid in the face.

It wasn't the way you'd hit a kid; it was too hard and kind of careless, and it knocked the kid backward against the railing, so that he dropped the bag again, and looked up at the blond man, with a thin face that held the mark of the blow in an ugly ruddy flush across one cheek.

It wasn't nice but it wasn't any of our business. I gave the blond a look and would have passed on, but that Johnny was a fellow who never used his head for anything.

The kid got up from the railing and started down with his mouth jumping all over his face, the way a kid's does when he's fighting to hold something in. He came down to us and bent to pick up the bag and that Johnny put a hand on it.

He said, "Leave it alone, sonny," in his slow, soft drawl. "Yo' paw's only totin' one. Suppose yo' let him cinch it to his own saddle."

From the steps the blond man peered down at him a second, looking surprised. Johnny came slim and bony, pretty pale after his sickness; he had a young, smooth, kind of babyish face and big blue eyes. This blond was a good fifty pounds heavier, a little fat, but with nice shoulders. And he was a careful guy with it all; he looked over Johnny until you could tell by his face that he figured there was nothing to worry about. Then he said, "Yeah?" and came down the steps. "Anybody askin' you?"

I tried to get Johnny away. Back in York, Pa., five or six years ago, he must have read a Western story, and ever since then he'd been trying to act like the hero. He'd drifted west, learned to ride a horse, and hooked up with Carson's outfit; and the real cowhands with us—there were some—must have thought he was cuckoo.

When I grabbed his arm and tried to pull him away, the big blond must have thought he had us chilled, and of course that was just Johnny's turkey. When this fellow grabbed his coat lapels, crushed them together, and yanked him toward him, Johnny came without

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trying to break away; but as he came he shifted his body a little and brought his right up from the hip, short and sharp.

Big Blond went back against the railing this time, knocking his head hard against it—though of course Johnny claims it was the punch—and he didn't look surprised or anything. He was out cold before he slid down to the floor.

Trouble in a strange town is bad, and the only thing that saved us from plenty was that there was no one around but the kid. I grabbed Johnny's hand and pulled him up the stairs, and we crossed the inside part of the station trying not to walk too fast. There were a couple of taxis in line outside; I got into the first one with Johnny behind me, and just then the kid eeled in out of nowhere.

He couldn't have been more than ten. Small and skinny, with a narrow, sharp face and one of those dinky little caps that rich kids wear on the back of his head, he stood staring at Johnny with big dark eyes that blazed brightly. He said, "Thank you," in a shrill voice that shook a little. "It was—it was very good of you to help me."

Looking real pleased with himself, Johnny grinned at him.

"When loco cows run wild," he drawled, "I reckon it's my job to do a little throwin'."

The kid kept on staring at Johnny.

"I wonder, sir—" He stopped for a long while here, flushing. "I wonder if you'll let me go with you—just for tonight of course, sir. You see that man isn't my father and I won't go back to him."

"Not your paw?" Johnny drawled. "Who is the varmint?"

"Harold," the kid told us, as if that explained everything.

"Okay, podner," Johnny drawled. "Strikin' camp in the park tonight might be cold. Yo' can shakedown with us till sunup."

"Thank you," the kid said, and climbed in.

The cab started. The kid kept looking at Johnny.

"I hope I'm not too much trouble —" He hesitated a moment. "My father lives here. And Harold—that man—was bringing me to him. I thought Father was ill, but on the train he—he chided me about it, as if Father was all right."

"Chided you." I rubbed my ear and looked at him close; I never knew a kid that talked like that. "Well, suppose you go to your father now. We'll put you in a cab."

He shook his head quickly; he even looked a little dismayed that I'd thought of that.

"I'd rather not, sir. You see, I don't think he'd be in. Harold said he wouldn't get back from New York until tomorrow. When I see him in the morning he'll give me money and I'll pay you for my hotel room."

"Don't yo' worry yo' head about that," Johnny told him.

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"Oh, no," I said. "Meet Morgan and Dupont, kid. And where's he goin' to sleep anyway? Carson will have a double room for us. And I got eighty cents."

"Bunk with me." Johnny turned to him. "Yo' won't object, podner?"

The kid's face was just shining; his eyes looked reverent and kind of shocked.

"Oh, no," he whispered. "Oh, no. I like you very much, sir. If you'll have me—if it isn't a bother—"

He was a funny kid all right. But I didn't sleep well; G-men chased me all night.

The next morning I got up about nine, but he and Johnny were already gone. I dressed and had my breakfast and let Billy Carson know we were in. Then I went over to the armory where the rodeo was being held, and met them in the arena.

You couldn't tell which of them was having the better time—Johnny just rambling on about life on the range, and how he could draw and shoot a gun faster than anyone in the West, or the kid keeping close to him and drinking it all in and asking for more.

"Mo'nin'," Johnny said, when he saw me. "Tex and I reckoned we'd get over a little early and cut out strays."

"Sho'ly," I said. "Some day they'll catch you the wrong side of the Mississip and hang you to them thar cottonwoods. Can't you lay off that till after lunch, Two Gun?"

"Do they—" the kid turned to me —"do they really call him Two Gun, Mr. Joyce?"

"Among other things," I said. "And they call you Tex?"

He looked down at my belt buckle. "Yes, sir. Tex Jones."

"No," I said. "The killer from Gulchville? You could pick out something snappier than that. Tiger Tressady, or the Badlands Badman. Didn't you phone your father yet?"

"Yes, sir. But there's no answer; he mustn't be back yet." After he'd said that he hesitated, putting his hands nervously in his pockets and then taking them out again. "We—I thought, Mr. Joyce, you might allow me to stay and see the rodeo tonight. I won't be any bother. You could—"

Pretty soon he'd want the moon. I wouldn't have cared myself, but I knew Billy Carson wouldn't like it; it might give the show a bad name if any publicity came out of it. As it stood, Billy might find out about the kid any time now.

"Now, listen," I said. "You go home and get your father to bring you. We'll be in town three days. He'll be back before then, so there's plenty of time."

"No. You see, Mr. Joyce"—he looked away from me—"my father doesn't like shows. And he's very busy. He wouldn't have time, you see."

"Not even if you asked him?"

"He's—he's very busy," the kid said, looking hopefully at Johnny. "If you don't let me stay today, I

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won't be able to come, Mr. Joyce. Father can't take me. He never has. I wanted to go once before, but he didn't have time."

That big simpleton Johnny shifted his feet and cleared his throat and put his thumbs inside his belt, the way cowboy actors do when they meet the villain.

"Reckon it'll be all right," he told me. "I'll ride herd over him, Joe. One mo' maverick can't make no 'count."

The kid's face came back to me, gleaming all over. So what could I say?

Most of the day I was stuck at the hotel with Billy Carson, checking up accounts and getting out mail. It was five before I got back to the armory.

The kid was down in the cattle stalls, with Johnny explaining—and inventing—a lot of stuff in that oozy Western dialect. Very quiet Tex Jones was; but every inch of him was alive. I took him in to see Old Pal, the trick horse, put him up on his back and had Old Pal kneel down, and walk slowly around, and hold up one hoof.

Somehow that kid began to tickle me. You never saw anyone in your life that enjoyed a thing half so much; it all was new to him and you could tell he felt almost as if it wasn't true.

When he asked me about myself, I lied. When I was a boy, I said, rustlers killed my father and took his ranch from him; then I'd gone away and practiced drawing a gun for years until I was grown, and then I'd gone back to the town and called that rustler out and shot him through the heart.

It was eight o'clock before we knew it, and we had to hurry back to be in time, for of course the kid couldn't miss a second. I put him in an empty box and stayed with him while the first event was run off. After it Johnny came over and talked to us, all rigged out in spurs and chaps and shirt and hat, until you could see the kid just busting.

When it came time to rope and tie a steer Johnny went off, and I slipped away for a second to talk to the timekeeper, Abe Metz. By a coincidence or something Johnny threw his baby in the shortest time, and you should have seen the kid then.

"Hurrah!" he shouted. "Hurrah for Johnny!" Standing up on his chair he hammered his fists around in the air, yelling until he was hoarse. That part even carried him over later, like I knew it would have to, when a tough bronco almost threw that Johnny into the balcony.

After it was all over he was still sort of simmering. I bought him a wide-brimmed hat, just like ours only small enough to fit him; Cal Nevers, who did rope tricks, gave him a length he'd stopped using. Then we went downstairs to the dressing room, where Abe Metz said there was someone up in the office looking for me.

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The someone was a small man with a very sharp face and sly black eyes. When I gave him my name he stood up and shook my hand.

"Mr. Joyce," he said, clearing his throat delicately once or twice. "A pleasure I've been looking forward to all day, sir. It was a difficult job to locate the right taxi driver. But after that—" he nodded brightly at me—"I had no trouble. The clerk at your hotel was good enough to give me your name. He'd seen you come in with the boy, you know."

I told him how it happened, and how the kid couldn't get in touch with his father. He agreed with everything I said, very pleasant and open. The cab driver told him how the boy had begged to go with us; he could understand that there was no criminal intent on my part.

But as Gordon Oneal's legal representative—here he presented me with a card—he must of course take immediate personal custody of the lad until Mr. Oneal got back from New York.

The name on the card was Walter Mitchell, and there was nothing I could do but take him downstairs. When we got back to the dressing room Johnny and the kid were still there, talking over in one corner.

Walter Mitchell hurried over with his arms extended. "Gordon," he cried. "Your father's worried dreadfully, boy. Why didn't you come to see me?"

The blaze and everything died out of the kid's eyes.

"Hello, Mr. Mitchell. I was going home now, right away. Is Father back yet?"

"Practically." Mitchell smiled at him and took his hand. "He's due in on the midnight train, and he'll be waiting at my house most anxiously for us. We'd better hurry. But say goodbye to your friends first, Gordon."

Well, we shook hands and I wrapped the rope up for him. At the door he stopped and turned back to us.

"You could come to see me tomorrow, Mr. Joyce," he said. "You and Johnny. I'm sure Father would like to meet you."

"I'm sure he would," Mitchell said. He looked as if he was in a hurry to get away.

"We'll try," I told him, though I knew I wouldn't have time. "So long, Tex Jones."

His face came around again with a stiff grin still on it, and he nodded at me as if to show that we both knew it was a joke all along. Somehow that grin stuck in my mind afterward, so that I felt sorry for him although I didn't know why. Tex Jones! Wasn't it a laugh?

All the next afternoon I was at the armory, getting back to the hotel with Johnny just before supper. Who do you think we found sitting in our bedroom, looking at us solemnly the second we opened the door?

Of course Johnny was pleased and so was I, but it wasn't altogether a

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question of that. Running away a second time wasn't going to be so easy. They might think we were edging him on to it. So after I said hello, and after Johnny drawled was he back on the old range for a set down, I got serious.

"Listen, Tex," I said. "You can't run away like this again. It might get us in trouble with the police. And you wouldn't want that."

He stared at my belt for a long while, and I'm so dumb I didn't realize that was to make his voice steady and keep his face still.

"No," he whispered. "I'll go, Mr. Joyce. But you see Mr. Mitchell didn't take me to my father. He locked me up in a room in his house and said Father would come today. But he never did. And I—I got afraid. I put a chair on a table and pushed them over to the door and climbed out through the transom.

"Then I walked over to Father's but there wasn't anyone home. I thought there might be something wrong." His lips kind of worked for a second but he got hold of himself quickly. "And I didn't know what to do. But I won't stay here, Mr. Joyce, if it will get you in trouble with the police. I'll be all right. I'll—"

He got up, nodded at us, and started for the door, and I went over and kind of wrestled with him, asking what was he talking about. I felt ashamed of myself. He'd come back to us because he didn't know where else to go, I suppose; but, just like last night, when he knew he wasn't wanted he was ready to push off.

You had to like that kid. Probably even if we let him go he'd have found excuses for us—thought it was his own fault, maybe, although he wouldn't be able to figure out why. He was the kind of kid that would do that.

Anyway I sat him on the bed, and questioned him until the story came out.

It started day before yesterday, when he'd been at a boarding school down in Virginia, ready to go off to a school friend's home in South Carolina for the Easter holiday. When he got on the train with the other kid, the big blond Harold came up to him and gave him a note from his father. The note said his father was sick and wanted to see him, and the kid knew it was his father's writing.

So he got off at the next stop, his boy friend promising to keep quiet about what happened, and he and Harold had come up again on the night train. He wouldn't say why he had to sneak off like that to see his father, but he didn't have to. When he got to that part of the story the name Gordon Oneal began to mean something to me.

After the kid was finished telling us that, I did the only thing that seemed logical, until I found out what this was all about; I told him and Johnny to go down and eat in the restaurant, and I started off to

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see the lawyer. On the way I fitted Gordon Oneal together in my mind.

Once it had broken, that part just kept right on; it was so plain now that I couldn't understand why I failed to see it at first. It was only about a year ago that Oneal's name had been in the papers almost every day. A time before that Mrs. Oneal —the kid's mother—had died, leaving five or ten million dollars, and after her death this Oneal, who had never been much good, had gone entirely to pieces.

From what I'd read he was the blacksheep son of an English family, though his wife had been an American girl. Just before her death they'd separated, and all the money had been left to the kid, though somehow or other Oneal had wangled himself in as guardian, and then gone in for drink, high life, and lots of fun.

Of course he'd neglected the boy; and in a little while someone had found the kid in a hunting lodge of Oneal's, sick and uncared for, with Oneal off in New York, and only a dumb caretaker around. There'd been a bitter court battle, and it came out that the kid had the sickness that children get when they aren't fed right; so the court had removed him from Oneal's custody, and appointed some old lawyer as guardian, since Mrs. Oneal had been an only child, and had left no close relatives.

Trying to think back, that was as far as I got. It made things slightly clearer, but there was still a good deal that wasn't explained.

Walter Mitchell's office was in an old rundown building on St. Paul Street. A girl showed me in. As I came in, Mitchell rose from a flattop desk set against the side wall.

"Mr. Joyce!" He shook hands warmly. "You may go, Ida. I won't need you any more tonight. I can close up myself for once."

The girl went out and he turned to me. "I know Mr. Oneal will suitably reward you just as soon as—"

"It isn't that," I said. "I came to find out why you didn't take the boy to his father. Why you locked him in your house all day. He's in my hotel room now."

"Oh." He looked displeased for a moment; then with that confidential man-to-man air of his that didn't go with the sharp face and the sly eyes, he put his hands on the desk and leaned forward.

"Ah—I represent Mr. Gordon Oneal, as I think I told you last night. Unfortunately business kept him in New York an extra day, so that he did not get in when we expected. Now we have had a good deal of trouble with young Gordon, Mr. Joyce—this isn't the first time, nor the fifth, that he's run away. You can see that when the responsibility was mine I had to take pains to make him secure. That's plain, isn't it?"

"It might be," I said, "if we were talking about the same thing.

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There's a little detail of getting him away from school. Mr. Oneal has no legal right to the kid now. All he did was practically starve him."

The door behind me opened and his eyes went to it before he could answer.

"Just a moment," he said hurriedly. "Wait in the outer office, please, Mr. Bonner."

The door behind me closed, though nobody said anything back there. When Mitchell went on, his voice was lowered to a whisper.

"Mr. Oneal does not desire any more publicity. The whole affair is —ah—a little difficult to explain. If —" he stopped for a moment to look at me shrewdly—"if I could see you at your hotel in an hour I could go into greater detail. Any inconvenience you—that is, I am sure Mr. Oneal will pay generously for your discretion."

"I'll be looking for you," I said.

"Fine, fine." But you could tell his smile was false now; and over it his eyes looked worried.

Going out through the other office I had a glimpse of Mr. Bonner —a small, pale, deadly looking potato, very nicely dressed, sitting against the wall with a topcoat over his arm and yellow gloves in one hand.

In the corridor I stopped and lit a cigarette. I didn't like Mitchell; I didn't like Bonner. And judging by the way Mitchell had lowered his voice after he appeared, that stranger had something to do with it. What could they want with the boy? Nothing good, I thought.

So I wasted two minutes hesitating; and then, because I wanted to find out the truth and not listen to a story Mitchell would have ready for me, I went back to the outer door, opened it pretty quietly, and stepped inside.

The door to the private office was closed, but I could hear their voices. When I got on one knee by the door and put an eye to the keyhole I could see them all right, and hear them too.

"It isn't that," Mitchell was saying, so earnestly that there was a little uneasiness in his voice. "It's just —well, you can't blame me for making sure. I want my money before Oneal gets the boy."

Bonner nodded.

"But you have the kid now?"

"I know where he is," Mitchell admitted cautiously. "But I'm not turning him over to you, Artie."

"Sure." The other chuckled faintly, without warmth. "When you get yours the kid's gone and I'm out. But you're all set."

"Listen." Leaning forward, Mitchell's voice almost quivered. "Just listen to me, Artie. I'll be fair with you—the boy's with this Joyce. He's in his room now at the Imperial Hotel. I'm going there to get him tonight."

"Thanks for the tip." I could hear that faint chuckle again. "You and Oneal had it fixed pretty. I grabbed the kid and ran all the risks; if any-

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thing broke neither of you would know anything about it. I'd take the rap. You figured I was so dumb I wouldn't know what you wanted him for."

I could see drops of perspiration on Mitchell's face.

"Now, Artie—"

"Shut up," Bonner said. "I looked things up. Oneal had an uncle who died in England and left the kid another fortune. So if Oneal gets him over there he's fixed again, because the English courts would appoint him guardian, and he'd have the gravy. But first he has to get the kid out of this country. So he gets in touch with you, and you hire me, and I figure things out pretty. I even picked a time when he'd be visiting, so that the school wouldn't miss him right away. Harold says he told this other kid not to say anything about him coming here, so this other kid's people and the school each think he's at the other's place. That gave Oneal time. Maybe Harold spoils it by losing him, but after this no one fumbles. I'm handling it myself."

After he stopped talking it got very quiet. Mitchell's face was glistening.

"Why don't we get the boy together, Artie? That way we—"

"No," Bonner said. "You crossed me once and you're out. You weren't even going to give me the two grand you promised."

"Wait a minute," Mitchell said, his breathing heavy. "I see what you want. You're going to England with Oneal and cut in on him over there. That's your plan."

"You're smart," Bonner said.

Mitchell leaned forward, his sharp face twisted with anger. "But I can break the thing before you get out of the country. I can have you and Gordon Oneal thrown in jail, and the boy sent back to school. If you try to fool me that's what I'm going to do. There's no way—"

Bonner didn't answer him; he didn't even appear to move quickly as he took his right hand out of his jacket pocket and put it in between the folds of the topcoat on his left arm.

Muffled like that, a small automatic doesn't make much noise.

When Bonner came out of the inner office I was on my knees behind the stenographer's desk; and I didn't draw any kind of breath until his steps went out to the corridor and faded there.

It was after six; the building was very quiet. I got out of there as fast as I could.

Johnny and the kid weren't in the restaurant or in the room, so I went on over to the arena. In the dressing room I found Johnny, alone.

"Where's Tex?" I asked.

"Huh?" Johnny looked surprised; I think I knew just by looking at him what had happened. "Why, he pushed off with that podner of yours. He said you'd sent him."

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I didn't wait to hear any more. That Johnny! I should have known. Artie Bonner had the address and my name; in front of me he had practically said he was going for the boy.

Cursing Johnny, cursing myself for not seeing that before, I pushed out through the line of early ticket buyers at the entrance and out to the street.

It was pretty dark and pretty cold. In the corner drug store I looked up Gordon Oneal's address in a phone book, and a cab brought me out to his place in twenty minutes.

The house was in a pretty nice section, in what they called Roland Park—big houses and wide lawns, a lot of trees, and a look of money about it. I rang the bell. There were steps inside, the door opened, and a tall man with dark hair and a dark mustache looked out at me.

"Yes?" he asked very precisely, his face shaded from the light by the way he stood so that I couldn't see much of it.

I told him who I was.

"Oh." He drew the door back wider. "Mr. Joyce. Gordon told me how kind you were. Come in, please."

I went in, standing in the hall while he closed the door. Then he walked in front of me into a room on the left, switching on the ceiling lights as he entered. It had no rug on the floor, no books in the shelves at one side, no lamps around. All the furniture it had was a table, a couch, and two or three chairs. And even they looked shabby and worn, not what you'd expect from the outside.

"Things are rather upset," Oneal said. "You see, I'm sailing for Europe tomorrow. But I hoped you'd come, Mr. Joyce; I wanted to show my appreciation for—"

I told him that was all right. In the better light here you could see he must have been very handsome a couple of years ago; but now his features had kind of thickened and flowed together, and his eyes were bloodshot and shadowed.

"How's the boy?" I asked.

"Very well." He smiled briefly. "Upstairs asleep now. We're starting rather early—five. Our boat sails at noon and we're driving up."

"Then he isn't going back to school?"

His smile smoothed out quickly. "How much do you want?"

I shook my head.

"Ten thousand," Oneal said. "But I can't pay you until I get to England. I'll give you an I.O.U."

He was the kind of man that would see only that line of argument. But he could have said a million and it wouldn't have made any difference the way I felt then.

"The man you hired to get the boy here killed Mitchell," I said. "I saw him. Did you know that?"

"Mitchell?" he whispered. "Mitchell dead? But I—"

As he twisted his head awkwardly over one shoulder, muscles

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jumped out on his lean neck. He got rigid all over, and when I turned I saw the closet door open, with Artie Bonner standing in it.

The topcoat was over his arm and his two hands were under it. He was looking at me without any expression at all.

"Draw the shades," he told Oneal. "Get the kid dressed and take him out of here. Then call Harold and tell him to bring the car. We'll meet you at my place downtown."

Oneal was still in that strained position, and even though his body was shaking he couldn't seem to move, as if there was an invisible cage molded to him.

"But I didn't want that, Bonner. I didn't know you would—"

"He was going to talk," Artie Bonner said harshly. "There was one way to stop him, and you're in it up to your ears. This guy is the only one that can tag me. He saw me go into Mitchell's office but the girl didn't. She saw him. And that marks him as the last person to see Mitchell alive. So if they pick him up on a back road tomorrow everything's fine. He killed Mitchell and he got plugged himself. If the cops can't figure out why, they won't break their necks trying."

Oneal's face was like putty.

"No," he said. "No, I—"

But when Bonner looked at him Oneal started to walk away from the table like a drunken man. He drew the shades and went out to the corridor, and it got very still in the room, with Bonner's pale eyes fixed on me, not even blinking.

In five minutes Oneal came back, holding the boy by the hand. Tex was wearing the hat I'd given him, and he looked excited when he saw me.

"Mr. Joyce—when did you come? I did so want to see you again. Father said—"

"Get started," Bonner cut in. "Call Harold as soon as you get to my place."

The kid must have felt something was wrong. His face got solemn and he looked up angrily at Artie Bonner.

"Bring Mr. Joyce with us," he said. "I want to talk to him."

For a second Bonner's cold eyes looked at him.

"It's okay," I said. "We're old friends, Tex. Go on with your father."

But Oneal still stood in the doorway, watching me with glazed eyes.

"Get going," Bonner snarled. "With Joyce shut up we're clear. And if he talks it's the chair. Turn your mind on that."

"I can't," Oneal said. "I— We can't do it, Bonner."

"No?" Bonner said. His voice and his face and everything around him seemed frozen. "You yellow —"

Sobbing, the kid broke away from his father and punched his fist into Bonner's arm. It was fun-

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ny to see him do that with Oneal just standing there, moving his lips.

Bonner swept his arm out and knocked the kid over without taking his pale eyes from me. But he almost dropped the coat; and for just an instant the automatic showed.

The kid saw it. He got very rigid and even his tears stopped. My hands were so wet that they might have been in a bucket of water. I remembered thinking I was fifty and there wasn't too much left for me anyway. There was no sense in dragging the kid in—not when you knew what the cold flare in Artie Bonner's eyes meant for anyone who got in his way.

"Listen, Tex," I said. "Mr. Bonner and I just want to talk. We'll be out to the car in a minute. I'll see you then. Go on with your father."

I tried to smile but my face was too stiff, so I nodded. And at first I thought the kid believed me, because he got up from the floor and gave me that stiff grin of his.

"All right, Mr. Joyce," he said. "But come out soon. I want to say goodbye before we leave."

Then—what do you think that kid did? He just ducked and ran toward Artie Bonner.

I don't know how he did it so quick. Even before Bonner snarled and swung toward him he was hanging on the topcoat and yelling, "Mr. Joyce—get his gun, Mr. Joyce!"

I'm fifty and I'm fat, but I don't think I was more than a blur getting across that room. Bonner slammed the kid away and I reached him at the same time. He fired, but the topcoat must have bothered him. He missed. And then I had his hands, and the kid and he and I were struggling together.

There were shots—I don't know how many. When they came I had his hand turned in, and he must have pressed the trigger himself, because I couldn't even feel it through the cloth.

When the police came I guess it was me that did most of the talking. I said Artie Bonner had kidnaped the boy from school and brought him there to be ransomed, because Oneal had insisted on seeing him to be sure that he was still alive. I was an old friend that Oneal had confided in; and I'd hidden and jumped out on him and he was killed in a struggle. We said Mitchell was contact man; Bonner had shot him probably because he thought he was being double-crossed.

Of course Gordon Oneal agreed with everything I said. Later I got him alone, and told him he'd have to bring the boy back to school in the morning. To get off free he was only too glad to do that.

It was only for the kid's sake that I shielded Oneal. And Tex Jones was one nice kid. It was about ten when the police stopped asking

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questions and I was free to go, and he walked with me to the door.

"I guess it's so long," I said there. "Thanks for the hand, Tex."

He moved that pale little face of his sideways, as if he was embarrassed.

"I'd like to go with you," he whispered, kind of unsteadily. "You and Johnny, Mr. Joyce. I'd like to stay with you. I had such a fine time."

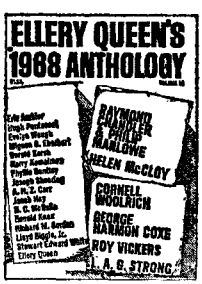
"Well," I said to him, "hurry up and grow and we'll see what we can do about it."

He looked at me solemnly, as if he knew I was only saying that. So I even promised that we'd visit him at school sometime.

When I reached the path he was still standing in the doorway, watching me.

"Goodbye," he said, in such a soft voice that I could hardly hear it. "I'll never forget you, Mr. Joyce. Nor Johnny."

"Keep riding 'em, Tex!" I called back. And he waved to me and I went off, walking pretty fast. I knew before I got to the corner he'd be crying behind that door; and I knew the thing he wanted most in all the world was that I shouldn't see him.



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SYNOPSIS—

of what happened before . . .

(please be sure to read)

Exactly one year ago *EQMM's* publication of James Cross's *The hkzmp gsv bzmp Case* caused startling repercussions. Now Mr. Cross has written an amusing sequel—which will probably cause further startling repercussions.

For the benefit of readers who may have missed *The hkzmp gsv bzmp Case*, or forgotten the devastating details, here is a synopsis of the events leading up to the sequel:

Communiqué, a monthly bulletin issued by the Department of State-U.S. Information Agency Recreation Association (no kidding, this is an actual publication!) sent out a call for a new rallying cry for the Vietnam war effort. This call spread consternation and terror among our country's secret agents. "What's to prevent the Enemy from getting hold of the best slogans, and *turning them around and using them against us*?" Blenkinsop, the friendly British agent from M.I.14, hit on the slogan "Spank the Yank," and his opposite number, U.S. agent Sebastian Nonesuch (said to have killed eight men), swore him to secrecy. Nonesuch put the potentially catastrophic slogan into code (hkzmp gsv bzmp) and then into a wall safe guarded by knee-high laser beams and a thermite bomb.

Nonesuch's Chief, the man called X, stopped the slogan contest and took elaborate precautions to prevent a leak; but when the Chief learned that a super deadly slogan did exist which "could be the psychological equivalent of all-out nuclear war for the Other Side," and that this devilish slogan had been stolen from the wall safe despite the knee-high photoelectric beams ("only a midget or a baby could have got under them"), the Chief assigned Nonesuch to the case, instructed him to join the Miami-Nassau budget tour run by the Agency Recreation Association, and to set a trap for the thief. It was Sebastian Nonesuch's most important case—and the fate of the free world hung in the balance!

Nonesuch's hilarious investigation, with the assistance of Andrea Mifflin, X's luscious and susceptible secretary, led to 27 suspects; but it was the least likely suspect—a six-foot-five junior executive—who

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proved to be the thief; he was a champion Limbo dancer who could slide under a bamboo pole at less than three feet—*under* the knee-high laser beams. After a night of love with Andrea, the great secret agent, Sebastian Nonesuch, retrieved the coded slogan, forced the thief to commit suicide, and returned to the arms of the voluptuous Andrea. The free world had been saved! (Don't misunderstand: *The hkzmp gsv bzmp Case* was the secret-agent spoof to end all secret-agent spoofs.)

Well, the repercussions *were* startling. We received a letter from Lynn N. Peterson, Jr., President of State-USIA Recreation Association, Inc., telling us how amused and flattered he and his entire staff were by James Cross's satire and asking for the author's address—you see, they were "mystified as to his identity." So the author proceeded to write a sequel revealing the "identity" of James Cross, "whoever you are". . .

THE MAN WHO CALLED HIMSELF JAMES CROSS

by JAMES CROSS

Who Is James Cross?

"[He has parlayed] an old issue of *Communiqué* into acceptance in the prestigious world of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* . . .*The Hkzmp Gsv Bzmp Case* is a pronounced success . . .

". . . through the halls of State and USIA—the question is: Who is this writer called James Cross (not listed in our phone directory) who knows so much of Association-sponsored travel to Miami and Nassau, who makes passing but knowing reference to USIA rapid reading courses . . . ?"

COMMUNIQUE, publication of the State Department-USIA Recreation Association, issue of Nov. 1966

SEBASTIAN NONESUCH POURED HIS FIRST CUP OF COFFEE OF THE DAY AS HE SAT at the wrought-iron table in the garden-terrace of his rented Georgetown red-brick townhouse. The morning's late Spring sun was almost oppressive as it slanted in on him under the gaily striped umbrella, and for a moment, sweating slightly, he wondered whether the heavy gold-brocade

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dressing gown *and* the red silk ascot scarf neatly held in place by a pearl-headed gold pin were not too much. But removing the ascot scarf would expose a few inches of T-shirt, while removing the dressing gown was unthinkable. Might as well sit around in suspenders and underwear like an off-duty cop, Nonesuch thought.

His gold cigarette case, with the special built-in lighter, was empty. Nonesuch sighed deeply and repaired to the house, returning with a pack of ultra-king-sized cigarettes with huge elaborate filters like smokestacks on an old-fashioned ocean liner and a small box of gummed labels. He broke open the cigarette pack and laid the twenty long cylinders on the table. Then he opened the little box. To each of the cigarettes he affixed a long thin printed label, effacing the brand name: *Especially blended for Mr. Sebastian Nonesuch.*

He shook his head angrily, thinking of what petty deceits he had been forced to for lack of income: the best man in the Service, he thought, and still only a lowly GS-11 rating.

He opened the *Washington Post.* It had been folded into a tight cylinder and hurled by a newsboy so that one quarter of page one was ragged and slightly muddy. He shuddered fastidiously. Anyone else in his position, he thought—James Bond, certainly—would have a manservant to unfold the morning paper and flatten it out and crisp it up with a hot iron before it reached the table. Even the most degraded and seedy private eye of the Los Angeles group would have a better-looking newspaper to read.

He finished the *Post* and *The New York Times* glumly, poured a third cup of coffee and lit another cigarette, coughing raucously when the flame reached the gummed label. He reached for his final reading matter. (He had been in luck this morning: the advance copy of the monthly issue of *Communiqué* had reached him by special messenger.)

At page 5 he suddenly stopped short, rereading the main article that had attracted his eye. He sat there, hot and sweating, his heart beating fast. Then he swore briefly, raced up the stairs, showered, dressed quickly but carefully in a lightweight charcoal-green suit and white button-down shirt, added the red- and green-striped tie of his old school (it had been an inferior one; he was always having to identify it to people; and to make matters worse, the colors clashed with most of his wardrobe—but one never knew, some day one might meet an old St. Simon Stylites boy in a high place.)

He ran out into the alley behind his house and took the jungle-cloth tarpaulin off his white Jaguar convertible. Camouflage, he liked to tell his friends, very hard to spot in the alley; but just whisk off the old tarp and

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one's away, with no nonsense about backing out of the garage. Those penny-pinching bureaucrats, he told himself; garage rental should be one of the perquisites of the job; I use my Jag in my work. But in the meanwhile it was better than nothing, and the tarp hid it very well, he thought, remembering with a sick shudder the time he had fallen behind in the payments and the man from the used-car lot had come around to attach it.

He zoomed across the bridge out to his office located in that huge suburban complex of intelligence operations clumsily hidden under the name of "Bureau of Trout Hatcheries." Then he walked over to the office of his Chief, the man he knew only as "X".

The first thing he noted as he came into the anteroom was that X had a new secretary. Miss Mifflin, of the pneumatic bust and buttocks, had departed; and it was a large and menacing Amazon, looking like a former unarmed-combat instructor, who told him curtly to sit down and wait.

The door to the inner office suddenly opened, and X himself stood there staring balefully at Sebastian Nonesuch. X said nothing, merely indicating with a curt nod that Nonesuch should enter. Sebastian got slowly to his feet and walked into X's office with something less than his usual verve and bounce.

X had already got back into his swivel chair behind the huge GS-18-rank-and-above executive-model desk. He let Nonesuch stand uneasily while he played with a special issue police .38 revolver. There was a pile of cartridges in an ashtray in front of him, and he had swung out the cylinder of the revolver and was idly spinning it.

The silence grew—ominous, lowering, unendurable.

"I see Miss Mifflin is no longer with you," Nonesuch said, wondering if the high, squeaky voice could be his own.

X lifted his head a fraction and stared up at him from under the dark thicket of his eyebrows.

"A talent for observation. You'll go far, Mr. Nonesuch."

He slapped his hand sharply on the desk.

"Perhaps you are wondering why you're here," he went on.

Sebastian Nonesuch gulped, feeling the folded copy of *Communiqué* burning a hole in his pocket.

"Not exactly," he said, "I just read—"

"Miss Mifflin is now filing documents in the unclassified storehouse in Peoria," X said. "There is very little that she knows in any event, and we could afford to be lenient. On the other hand—"

Nonesuch gulped nervously.

"On the other hand," X continued relentlessly, "you have been privy to a large amount of inconvenient data."

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"You know me, X," Sebastian said. "Keep it in the family," he went on, quoting a large yellow-and-black framed motto hanging on the wall behind X's desk.

"Mr. Nonesuch, in most respects our organization operates under Civil Service regulations. There are the same ranks, the same annual leave, sick leave, national holidays, retirement fund, and the like. Only in the matter of resignation of employees of the rank GS-9 and above do we have slightly differing regulations."

He picked up one of the cartridges, looked at it thoughtfully for a moment, then put it in a chamber, snapped the cylinder of the revolver back in place and spun the revolver in his hand, extending the butt-end toward Nonesuch.

"Your resignation is hereby accepted, Nonesuch," he said in the gratified tone of one who has solved his problem; "and here," he went on, wiggling the revolver slightly, "here are your final papers, so to speak. Take twenty-four hours to get your affairs in order."

Sebastian Nonesuch reached out and took the revolver.

"Don't forget to leave a note" X said. "You know the drill—gambling debts, a dread disease, *weltschmerz,* an unrequited love affair. Well," he continued, rising to his feet to signify the interview was over, "I see I have another appointment. Good luck, my boy."

Nonesuch pointed the revolver at X.

"Why, you mealy-mouthed, sadistic—" he said, pulling the trigger.

There was a loud click and X stood there still smiling.

"All right, Sebastian," he said impatiently, "give it to me. Just wanted to see how your nerve was. Hope it's better than your judgment. Sit down!" he went on with genial impatience. "Those are dummy cartridges. Teach you a lesson, though. Next time you may think for a few minutes before you start opening your big mouth."

"X," Sebastian Nonesuch said, "I swear to you. Not a word."

X reached into his desk drawer and brought out a marked copy of *Communiqué.*

"I've read it. First thing this morning. That's why I rushed over."

"Well, they've spilled the beans again," X said petulantly. "Have you read the story in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*? You should, you know, you really should; after all, you're the hero. It's thinly disguised as fiction, but it's all there. I must say they do quite well by you. One would think you were a personal friend of the author, this James Cross."

"I haven't read the story," Nonesuch said miserably.

"Little wonder. After the articles in *Communiqué,* EQMM has simply disappeared from the stands, selling like hot cakes, can't buy one for love

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or money; had to send Delaney up to the Little Falls Branch Library with a forged library card, and at first he couldn't get a copy. Finally he had to chloroform all the occupants of the Reading Room and steal a copy."

He tossed a battered, dog-eared copy of the magazine to Nonesuch. Thanks to the Service's rapid-reading course Nonesuch was able to skim through it in seconds.

"It's all there," he said, "every bit of it. One would think that he'd been there himself."

"Exactly," X said drily, "even to that little thing you had going with my former secretary. Do you wonder I suspected you at first?"

"Can't something be done, X?" Nonesuch asked, forgetting his own earlier jeopardy in his anger and horror at what had been laid bare.

"I understand EQMM is putting out a special reissue—100,000 copies for the National Capital area alone."

"Can't you appeal to their sense of patriotism?"

"Surely, Sebastian, you know better than that," X said drily.

"Buy off the publisher, then."

"Hopeless. This issue alone will make him rich beyond the dreams of avarice."

"Scare him."

"You may not remember, Sebastian, but this Ellery Queen has very powerful connections in the New York Police Department. He's not a man to be pushed around."

"Then what can we do, X?"

"Well, one thing I can do and have done is shut down *Communiqué*. At least we won't have the irony of a semi-official government publication advertising a magazine that has printed a thinly disguised fictional piece that violates security directives in several major respects. That's the second time this year we've had to jump on *Communiqué*. Where *do* they get their information from?"

"Do you have an assignment for me, X?"

"Yes, Sebastian, a hard one and a dirty one and a dangerous one—I trust you have taken advantage of the low-premium, cost-shared Federal life insurance program up to the fullest coverage commensurate with your rank."

Nonesuch nodded guiltily. He had, in fact, several months before, cancelled the policy and applied the savings to the monthly installments on his convertible.

"Oh, well, X," he said in what he hoped was a tone of breezy insouciance, but which in fact came out as a hoarse croak, "who wants to live forever."

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"That's the spirit, my boy," X said heartily. "Now your assignment is this." He lowered his voice and pointed to the headline on the *Communiqué* article: *"Who Is James Cross?"*

"I imagine I should start with the man who wrote the article," Nonesuch said judiciously.

X looked at him with a certain impatience—as if Nonesuch were a slightly backward child.

"All checked out," X said. "All he knows is in the article. *Communiqué* tried to get the information from Ellery Queen without his knowing it—damned good try, at that. Then they tried James Cross's literary agent—we'd call him a 'cut-out'—and that didn't work either. Then they tried rereading the story for some hidden clues to James Cross's identity. As you can see, that didn't pan out. So now it's up to you, Sebastian. First thing I want you to do is to go over to the Pentagon. See one of their computer men, one of the whiz kids, a Colonel Wilson Weatherwax. Line up just what we have so far, program it and feed it in and see what the computer can make of it."

"Right, X," Nonesuch said, getting to his feet.

"That ain't too damn much ta go by," Colonel Weatherwax said. Behind the huge thick glasses, like two milk-bottle tops sawed off and framed in something like the thick, black strands of old-fashioned licorice sticks, his myopic eyes were disapproving. The large white, hairless, ovoid head lolled disapprovingly on the scraggly neck. For a moment Nonesuch thought that the weight of the giant brain behind the high, waxy forehead would overbalance the frail, tiny body and tumble Colonel Weatherwax from his chair.

"I have all there is," Nonesuch said defensively. "First of all, as *Communique* pointed out, he's a man who knows much of the State-USIA Recreation Association's sponsored travel to Miami and Nassau. So look for a traveler. Second, he's had contact with USIA rapid-reading courses. So look for someone who used to move his lips when he read and now does a page a second. Third, he knew all about the slogan contest even though we hushed it up at once. So look for a man who could get hold of an early copy of *Communiqué* before we choked it off."

"Maybe he's one a dem creep-type guys; he just read that magazine fer kicks, like," Colonel Weatherwax said.

Nonesuch winced fastidiously. At eight years of age Weatherwax had been discovered as a mathematical genius still in a kindergarten in a Brooklyn slum school. By 13 he was in M.I.T. He earned his Ph.D. at 18. It was an amazing example of rapid growth, of forced feeding. Weather-

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wax knew all there was to be known of mathematics, of computer theory —his full colonelcy at 22 gave evidence of that. He was a credit to the scientific crash program; but somewhere along the line his mentors had let him skip diction and elementary grammer. He could write out and explain incredibly complex equations, but he could barely spell the simplest words. In the daily half hour of recreation that he allowed himself, he read pulp-magazine Westerns.

"Point four," Nonesuch said. "He knows something about the Service, God knows how. He's been in X's office, seen his former secretary. And he knows quite a lot about my private life, damn him!"

"Right off'n the toppa muh head, Jack, widout no computer, I'd figure maybe *you* was this guy James Cross."

"I resent that," Nonesuch said. "Upon my word, Colonel, you allow yourself great latitude."

"Cool off, Jack, can't ya take a joke? Okay, give it here," he went on, reaching for the paper on which Nonesuch had carefully listed all the clues to the author's identity. "We'll ask da Big Brain fa ya."

Nonesuch rose to depart.

"Siddown, siddown," the computer genius said, reaching into his desk drawer and taking out a roll of shiny metallic tape and an instrument that looked something like a paper punch. He closed his eyes and thought for a moment. Then he took the punch and began to make a series of holes in the roll. After he had unwound and punched about three feet he pulled out the front of his desk.

Nonesuch could see a kind of slot, with a push button beneath it, and above that what looked like a small TV set. To the left was another and longer slot with a little basket beneath it.

"Dis here's a little gadget I dreamed up," Weatherwax said. "Remote control, like. Fa' quick answers. Feed it in here, goes down ta Computer Central, an it feeds back on a closed circuit, like."

He stuck the metal tape into the small slot and pushed the button. Somewhere inside the desk, teethed gears seized the tape and pulled it downward. There was a steady, ominous clicking. Then a bell rang, and the TV screen lighted up. Nonesuch could see the words *Null-P* glowing on the screen.

"Too bad," the Colonel said, "but like I figgered, it ain't enough."

The bell rang again, and a little three-by-five card fell into the basket from the large slot. *Evidence insufficient*, the first line read. Then, ominously double spaced, the second line: *Do not waste my time.*

Weatherwax laughed.

"Dat's George," he said, "I use him fer da tough ones, an' he hates

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muh guts. Dat's why I keep away from him. If dat lousy machine hadda pair a arms he'd break muh back."

He snipped off another foot of tape and punched it vigorously. Then he stuck it in the slot and pushed the button.

As he got nervously to his feet, Nonesuch saw the TV picture develop a series of writhing, indignantly wavy lines, flashing red and brilliant. Colonel Weatherwax leaned back in his chair and began to laugh loudly.

"Hey, Georgie," he yelled, "try that one in ya gut."

Nonesuch moved toward the door. As he reached it, the computer genius turned to him and waved dismissal.

"Okay, Jack, glad ta help. Any time. Come back when ya've got more dope."

It was approaching dusk when Nonesuch reached his Georgetown home. The best time of the day, he thought reminiscently, *L'heure bleue,* as the French put it, the hour of love—followed by a good dinner. He began thumbing through his address book.

His first phone call fell somewhat short of success.

"Oh, Sebastian," Gloria giggled, "I've just been reading that story about you in Ellery Queen. Wow, what a great lover! Your boss's private secretary; how did he like it?"

"Why don't you come over and have a drink with me?" he said, breathing heavily. "I'll tell you all about it here."

"Uh-*uh*. You think I want to get my name in a story like that other girl and have everyone read about me in Ellery Queen. Not a chance, Sebastian darling."

With Marcia and Amy-Lou and Cynthia the calls were even shorter. Each time he made the mistake of identifying himself at once and plunging into conversation.

"I'm sorry," the last voice said coldly—he easily identified it as Cynthia's. "Cynthia's out for dinner tonight."

Nonesuch slammed the phone onto its cradle and poured another drink. Then he drove over to Mario's.

"Ah, Signor Nonesuch," Mario said genially, "the usual—the no-cal lasagne, carbohydrate-free?"

"To hell with that," Nonesuch said, "I'll have the regular, *and* plenty of garlic bread with it, and a side order of pizza."

When Nonesuch returned to his house, he went to the pantry, poured himself a brandy, and walked into the study. After two steps into the room he stood there frozen.

The man who sat comfortably in Nonesuch's favorite armchair was heavily mustached and bearded; but the hair, perhaps originally black,

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was now dappled by patches of viridian green, like a seedy and ancient dinner jacket. A clumsy fake, Nonesuch thought contemptuously; nevertheless it served the purpose of completely obscuring the stranger's face.

"Who the devil are you?" Nonesuch demanded.

"Mr. Nonesuch," the intruder said, "I would not try to reach for the gun in your shoulder holster; the brandy snifter you are holding will handicap your movements. Moreover," he went on, indicating an open copy of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* in his lap, "although this is a pocket-sized publication, it is quite large enough to cover a small single-shot derringer. Single-shot, it is true, but the slug is a large one—quite big enough to blow a hole in you as large as the family-size pizza you have just been eating at Mario's. Put your gun on the table, Mr. Nonesuch—ah, yes, that's it; and sit down and listen. As you have probably surmised," the stranger added, "I am James Cross."

Nonesuch nodded. "It's no good," he said, "we'll get you in the end. The Service never misses its man."

"Come, come, Mr. Nonesuch," the man who called himself James Cross said, "I have a little proposition for you. For obvious reasons I have no desire to have my identity known, and you might come embarrassingly close. Now, what I want you to do is to carry out certain instructions that will permanently close the case. In return, a certain sum will be paid each month into your checking account—for an indefinite time. We know something of your standard of living and your incongruent salary."

"You rotten cur, I'll see you hanged first!" Nonesuch paused a moment, and reflected. "How much?"

The man who called himself James Cross took a notebook from his pocket, tore out a page, and wrote a figure on it. He handed it silently to Sebastian Nonesuch.

My God, Nonesuch thought; even without promotions, from now on I can live like James Bond, like Lord Peter Wimsey even—a larger house, a manservant to polish my silver and iron the morning papers, a new wardrobe, girls, a brand-new Mercedes 230 SL, girls, a wine cellar, girls, vacations to Europe, girls. He turned to the stranger.

"I'll take it," he said simply.

"I thought you would."

"But why so much?"

"Mr. Nonesuch, I have independent means. I want my anonymity, and I can afford to pay for it."

"You want me to give up the search for you?"

"Not at all, Mr. Nonesuch. I merely want you to take the material you already have, the clues to the identity of James Cross, and add a few

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items to it—I have them already punched on tape; it is merely a matter of feeding them into the computer. Go back, combine the two tapes, and from then on let the computer handle it."

He handed Nonesuch a couple of feet of punched tape, identical in type to that used earlier in Colonel Weatherwax's office. Nonesuch took the tape gingerly and put it in an envelope.

"I imagine that's about it," the stranger went on. "Just follow instructions—we'll know about it soon enough; and after that the manna will begin falling from heaven right into your checking account."

He paused and stared at Nonesuch's necktie. Then he raised his beard a few inches so that Nonesuch could see the red and green stripes of his old school tie, the mate of Sebastian's.

"All things considered," the stranger said, "a pretty rotten school, but we St. Simon Stylites graduates might as well stick together. Remember the school motto—*Room at the Top*. Glad to help an old boy out."

He bowed gravely and walked into the night. Nonesuch watched him leave; then he poured himself another brandy, rolling it on his tongue as if it were liquid gold.

The next morning he called Colonel Weatherwax at the Pentagon. A strange voice answered.

"No," it said, "Colonel Weatherwax isn't available. I'm Major Swift. Can I help you?"

Nonesuch identified himself quickly.

"Oh, sure," the voice said, "I know all about it. Why don't you come over. Anytime."

Major Swift was a fleshy, red-faced man, almost bursting from his uniform. He ushered Nonesuch into Colonel Weatherwax's office and pressed him genially to take a comfortable chair.

"You just give me the data," he said. "I'll have one of the technicians program it, and you'll get the answer in a couple of minutes."

"Is Colonel Weatherwax tied up?" Nonesuch asked. "I was wondering if—"

"Oh, I'm all clued in," the Major said.

"I was wondering if Colonel Weatherwax—" Nonesuch began again.

"I've only been here a couple of weeks," Major Swift replied evasively, "Used to be in public relations, then Psychological Warfare—that damn Win-the-War slogan for Vietnam that those cookie pushers over in State fouled up. Got sent over here. Want me to try to program something that'll project an enemy identity, a real image, something people can recognize and get mad at. You know; in the Western, the bad guys wear black hats; the good guys wear white hats.

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"Well, the trouble is down in the boondocks in Vietnam they all look alike. Old Cong, how do you tell him from the other guys? You know what they say in the baseball parks: "Get a scorecard—you can't tell the players without a scorecard.' Well, that's our problem. Old Cong and the good guys—how do you tell 'em apart?"

"About Colonel Weatherwax," Nonesuch prodded gently.

"Oh, hell," Major Swift said, "you might as well know. P.R.'s getting a release out for the P.M.'s. You know that machine, that special computer he developed?"

"The one he called George?"

"Yeah, well I guess you know they just couldn't get along. George was always coming back with these nasty messages to the Colonel, and the Colonel was always shooting tapes at George that gave him a little short circuit and fouled him up, gave him a real bellyache."

"Him," Sebastian Nonesuch thought sickly.

"Well, this morning the technicians came in and there's the Colonel down in Computer Central with a couple of yards of cable wrapped around his neck, strangled. Must have sneaked in last night to keep their feud going, and George got him. Anyhow, while he was choking, the Colonel got hold of one of those metal stools the technicians sit on and tossed it right through George's transistors. Finished him off before he choked to death himself. Don't know how he managed it, a scrawny little character like that."

"You mean Colonel Weatherwax is dead?"

"That's what I said, brother; and George, too. I tell you the Secretary was broken-hearted. Gonna have a big ceremony at Arlington tomorrow when they bury him. Give him a posthumous Legion of Merit medal."

"I'm sorry about the Colonel," Nonesuch said insincerely.

"Oh, the Colonel," Major Swift said, "he gets buried this afternoon. No fuss. I'm talking about George, the computer. They've got a real big plot for him out at Arlington, and the Secretary's gonna make a speech—P. R.'s working on it now. Well," he went on, "I guess we better get down to business. You want to feed some more dope into one of the other computers. Just give it to me and we'll program it."

"I've got it programmed already," Nonesuch said. "It's just a matter of combining it with the earlier data."

"Fine. Give it to me and I'll get one of the technicians on it. We can wait in the Colonel's office," he went on. "They've hooked the remote control onto a new computer—B for Betty. I don't know how it is, but somehow the ones with girl's names are calmer and easier to handle. Just a little sympathy, a little appreciation, and they stay on an even keel."

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They sat there silently for a minute or two in the late Colonel Weatherwax's office. Nonesuch wondered idly what small boy at that very moment was being discovered and trained to take the Colonel's place a decade from now. No wonder the Arlington cemetery rites were for the machine; with a little care the computer would have lasted forever, while flesh and blood, susceptible to mortal shock, wore out too soon.

The bell on the little machine at the desk rang furiously. A small card dropped into the metal basket. Major Swift handed it to him without reading it.

James Cross believed non-existent, the card said with curt simplicity.

The bell rang again.

Obviously mythological folk-hero, the second card read, *based roughly on symbolic figure Toltec vegetation god, symbolizing seasons.*

The bell rang a third time.

Suggest alternative hypothesis—James Cross story non-existent. Phenomena of mass hypnosis not infrequent; more tenable all other alternatives. Suggest accept hypothesis non-existence James Cross as highest probability at .01 level. Abandon further search. That is all.

The bell rang a fourth time. Nonesuch reached for the card and had time to see the final message. *Honey,* it said, *it's real nice working for you; you really send me.*

"That's personal," Major Swift said, grabbing the card and blushing. "She's a real nice kid, Betty. One of these days some genius is going to figure out a way we can make it together; and I'll tell you one thing, she's gonna be a lot nicer than some I've got stuck with."

"May I take the other three cards?" Nonesuch asked.

"Sure. Just a minute, I'll stamp them official for you. Well," he went on, "I guess that wraps it up. Always glad to help out."

"Thanks," Nonesuch said, wondering when the first deposit would reach his checking account. "Thanks a million, old boy."

"One thing," Major Swift said. "You've used Computer Central time and you've got your answer. When the machine says, 'That is all'—well, that's it; you've got it. It's like a directive. A copy goes to the White House. So that's all, boy; your problem's solved. Don't pick at it any more; we wouldn't like to hear you were unsatisfied. And if anyone wants to dispute the findings, he's welcome to do so; but he's apt to find that he'll have to take it up at a full Cabinet meeting; and the President—well, he doesn't like people who waste his time."

"Thanks again," Nonesuch said, pocketing the three cards.

"So that's the end of the trail, Sebastian," X said to him three-quarters

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of an hour later. "A vegetation god, mass hypnosis—it's hard to imagine; but Computer Central"—he almost genuflected—"Computer Central doesn't make mistakes."

"It was the data you gave me in the beginning," Nonesuch said diplomatically, "plus a few last-minute items I picked up that did the trick."

"Don't be modest, Sebastian; it doesn't become you. I prefer your old brash self," X said. "By the way, he added, "there should be a promotion for you fairly soon, and a few perquisites—garage rental, an expense account. No, no," he went on, choking off Nonesuch's gratitude. "You've deserved it, my boy. As bad a mess as I've every run across; but you managed to clean it up."

"Thank you, X," Sebastian Nonesuch said shyly.

"Not at all my boy. Now, be off with you; you've earned a spot of leave. I don't want to see you around here until next month."

After Nonesuch had closed the door quietly behind him, X sat at his desk for a few moments. He put the fingers of his hands together in front of him in the shape of a steeple and looked up at the ceiling. That was a mighty near thing for a while, X thought; *Communiqué* was getting pretty close to identifying James Cross. Thank heaven for that pompous young ass, Nonesuch; in this impermanent world the one thing you can count on is his fouling up an assignment.

Nevertheless, X thought, it might be just as well to get rid of the false beard right now. He opened his personal wall safe, the one behind the Renoir sun bathers, took out the seedy, green-patched beard, and stowed it in his attaché case, making a mental note to burn it in his outdoor barbecue.

He reached into his pocket and got out the letter addressed to James Cross—the one he had picked up earlier from his private and personal mail drop. His literary agent—somehow he still thought of him as a "cut-out"—reported further demands for Sebastian Nonesuch stories and enclosed a check. X licked his lips delicately.

Incredible, he thought; I had no idea one could actually earn money for this kind of thing; perhaps I've been in the wrong business all these years. On the other hand, he thought, perhaps this James Cross covername business is a bit trivial, just a touch unworthy of me. Now, I wonder if some enterprising publisher would be interested in something more solid—a good, sound, two-volume autobiography, for example, with a catchy title like. *Recollections and Reminiscences of Thirty Years of Undercover Spying.*

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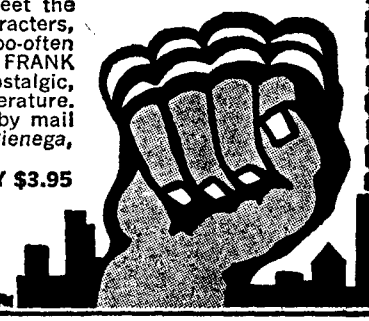

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Dr. Milton H. Helpern, Chief Medical Examiner of the City of New York, is not only a consummate practitioner of forensic medicine; he is also a wise man. Marshall Houts's study of Helpern, WHERE DEATH DELIGHTS (Coward-McCann, $5.95), is valuable for many fascinating accounts of cases and for its persuasive plea for a wider recognition of forensic science, but most of all for the many Helpern *dicta,* in which the doctor employs his profound knowledge of death to deepen our understanding of life and of the infinitely varied miracle that is man. (A large section is devoted to the most acute analysis yet published of the forensic failures of the Warren Commission.)

The thinking and writing of A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST TRIALS FROM SOCRATES TO EICHMANN, by Brandt Aymar and Edward Sagarin (Crown, $10), are hardly of a level to enlighten your understanding; but the 425 pictures are an absorbing lot, deserving library space.

★★★★ **THE HEIR OF STARVELINGS, *by Evelyn Berckman*** (Doubleday, $4.50)

Miss Berckman's unconventional and real characters and her wonderful sense of living history enable her to put the guts back into the gothic.

★★★★ **MURDER AGAINST THE GRAIN, *by Emma Lathen*** (Macmillan, $4.50)

This time it's a US-USSR wheat treaty that causes trouble for the Sloan Guaranty Trust; and John Putnam Thatcher has to collaborate with a Soviet detective. Witty, polished, poised and delightful.

★★★★ **W.I.L. ONE TO CURTIS, *by Philip Loraine*** (Random, $4.95)

Strikingly effective narrative method, with fine complex plotting and construction, makes one of the year's best spy-thrillers.

★★★★ **THE RARE COIN SCORE, *by Richard Stark*** (Gold Medal d1803, 50¢)

Theft of millions from coin-collectors' convention provides a model of the Big Caper novel—tight, hard, intricate and credible.

★★★ **THE PLEASANT GROVE MURDERS, *by John Holbrook Vance*** (Bobbs-Merrill, $3.95)

Joe Bain, in California's San Rodrigo County, is providing us with the best regional sheriffing since A. B. Cunningham's classic Jess Roden.

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The superb Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges, who made his American debut in EQMM some twenty years ago, includes one pure detective story and several related fictions in his choice from his own works: A PERSONAL ANTHOLOGY (Grove, $5)—along with fantasies, poems, essays, parables and other items all peculiarly Borgian which may help you to understand why this is my favorite living writer.

★★★ **BOUND TO DIE, *by William Price Turner*** (Walker, $3.95)

Solidly strong English first novel on brutal child-killing, balanced between police procedure and people, both well-observed.

★★★ **NO BONES ABOUT IT, *by Joan Fleming*** (Washburn, $3.95)

Nice odd off-trail and very likable book about affluence and murder within a scatter-brained family circle.

★★★ **MORTISSIMO, *by P. E. H. Durston*** (Random, $4.95)

Overlong but skilful first novel of death and intrigue in Rome, full of color and excitement.

★★★ **RALPH DACRE, *by Anne Stevenson*** (Walker, $4.50)

Hardly so much a gothic as an old-fashioned Romantic Novel (setting: north-west England around 1820), and a grand, ripe, vivid one.

★★★ **THE GAY DECEIVER, *by Peter Leslie*** (Stein & Day, $4.95)

Possibly not to every taste, but a technically impressive specimen of the New Humor—biting, ugly, clever and campy (in both senses).

Reprint dept.: Raymond Postgate's VERDICT OF TWELVE (Knopf, $4.95) seems as masterly a tourdeforce today as it did in 1940: a brilliant fusion of psychological novel, trial novel, and murder puzzle. . . . If you wish to trace the origins of the New Humor, see Frank Wedekind's THE LULU PLAYS (1895-1903), revived in the Tulane Drama Review Series (Premier t340, 75¢). Carl Richard Mueller's new translation and introduction are unworthy; but the plays are still astonishing as black and mordant farce.

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The newest "Dupin" story is not a tale of mysterious murders in the Rue Morgue; it is a tale of mysterious fires in the Rue St. Honoré—another previously unchronicled adventure of the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, the world's first fictional detective in the modern sense.

The mystery would, we think, have delighted and excited E. A. Poe himself—surely a series of inexplicable conflagrations would have piqued Poe's imagination. How, in Paris in the year 183–, could three fires be caused in warehouses that were not only empty of human beings and infernal machines but also hermetically sealed? An historical howdunit—an "impossible crime" that provides "Dupin" with an excellent opportunity to pit his wits, to test his powers of ratiocination, against an ingenious and resourceful arsonist . . .

THE FIRES IN THE RUE ST. HONORÉ

another "hitherto unpublished" tale of C. Auguste Dupin

by MICHAEL HARRISON

THE MAGNIFICENT OFFICES OF THE UNITED ASSURANCES ARE SITUATED, AS everyone knows, at No. 4, Boulevard des Italiens. The building, designed by one of the foremost architects, has become, in the few years since its erection, one of the spectacles of Paris; but those who have no taste for the fine arts, and know no more of the Corinthian Order than they do of Differential Calculus, flock to gaze at the noble building because of the unobtrusive notices displayed in the lower windows—notices which inform the world that *The Total Amount of Capital under the Administration of the United Companies for Fire and Life Assurance is 72,000,000 Francs*—upwards of £2,800,000 sterling.

To be in proximity, not so much to this almost unimaginably large sum as to those whose daily work brings them into such proximity, imposes on the crowd which gathers before the windows a sort of *religious* reverence. Each member of the concourse reads—silently or aloud, as he sees fit—the awe-inspiring sum printed on the notices.

To those to whom one million is inconceivable, here is a *façade* behind which not merely *one*, but over *seventy* such millions are locked away.

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No burglar would aspire to break in—past the richly attired footmen or more plainly habited guards—to open the strong-rooms which hold these princely riches.

Yet, if the suspicions of the Directors were to be regarded with respect, someone had found a way to tap this wealth without the necessity of passing the front-door of the United Assurances.

In the twenty years or more since my friend, the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, had been—shall we say "in practice"?—as a lay member of the detective police, he had come more and more to decline making those calls upon a client which, in his early days as a solver of puzzles, he had felt himself forced to make. As his reputation grew, so the demands upon his powers of ratiocination multiplied; he could afford to be *nice* in his choice of problems; and those whom he agreed to help were too grateful for the favor of his advice to begrudge making a call upon *him*.

Thus, to our little library or book-closet, *au troisième*, No. 33, Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain—which all Dupin's growing wealth would not urge him either to change or to abandon—came some of the most important personages of the several Frances of aristocracy, government, commerce, and industry.

Yet sometimes, for what appeared to me—and to others—a mere crochet, Dupin would indicate his wish to call upon some petitioner for his services, rather than receive the petitioner in our little book-closet, three storeys above the gentle traffic of the Rue Dunôt.

The present "case" was just such an instance of this harmless contrariness of Dupin's. An emissary of the United Assurances had called upon us in the Summer of 183-, and sketched out the problem. Dupin, listening to the man of affairs with only half an ear, and almost hidden behind a dense cloud of Latakia puffing from his meerschaum pipe, indicated with a simple gesture that the man should spare himself further talk.

"I shall call upon you Directors tomorrow, at eleven A.M. Pray arrange that they will be ready to receive me."

Thus it was that, in a fine tilbury of English make, behind a pair of spanking grays of English origin, Dupin and I were driven by the Company's coachman from the Rue Dunôt to the Boulevard des Italiens, while the hands of the shagreen-cased carriage-clock indicated a few minutes of eleven.

As we approached the entrance of the Rue du Helder and as the offices of the United Assurances came into sight, Dupin observed, with his customary light air, "With great commercial houses, their places of business are far more substantial than they. No breath of suspicion, no malicious

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or even honest rumor, can blow the bricks and mortar away. But how very vulnerable to ill-report even so well-founded an institution as this must be! There is every justification for their Directors' anxiety. Ah, here we are."

Within a few minutes Dupin and I were in the sumptuously appointed morning-room or parlor, to which we had been taken by a footman in livery, with the official who had called upon us bringing up the rear.

This person assured us that the Directors were even now assembling, and that he would do himself the honor of conducting us to them in exactly ten minutes' time—the intervening ten minutes being sufficient, he presumed, for further information to be placed at my friend's disposal.

"No," said Dupin imperiously. "What further information I need I shall ask for in the course of my conversation with your Directors. Pray, sir, lead the way."

"So be it," said the functionary, with a deep bow; and without further discussion we were ushered into the splendid board-room in which the policy of the United Assurances was determined.

We saw at a glance that the high direction of the Company had gathered to hear what Dupin had to advise—sufficient proof of the gravity which the Directors attached to the threat that had brought Dupin here.

I recognized the Dukes of Larochefoucault and Doudeauville and General Count de Schramm, a member of the Senate and a former Minister of War. After the introductions had been made, and the company had seated itself, Monsieur Lonstonnau, one of the two Managing Directors, indicated that he would act as spokesman for the Company.

Dupin nodded his agreement.

"I have already received some idea of what has happened," observed Dupin. "You suspect arson. You have not yet been able to fully justify your suspicions. If you pay, you will be condoning, possibly encouraging, this most anti-social of all crimes. If you refuse settlement of the claim without the strongest possible proof, you will be risking the good name of your Company, possibly even risking the Company's survival as a solvent concern. Is that the matter in a nutshell, gentlemen?"

"Excellently summarized, Chevalier," said the Duke of Doudeauville. "Now Monsieur Lonstonnau will tell you what we discovered as regards the policy-holder whose claims—"

"Whose *claims*?"

"*Claims,* Monsieur le Chevalier. Oh, there have been more than one, to be sure!"

"How many, Monsieur le Duc?"

It was Monsieur Lonstonnau who answered, at a sign from the President of the Company: "Three in all, Monsieur le Chevalier."

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"Indeed! This grows serious. And since there have been three, you must have already settled two of them?"

Monsieur Lonstonnau bowed.

"To a total of over half-a-million francs—nearly twenty-two thousand pounds sterling. The claims covered a period of only two years."

"An income of over ten thousand pounds sterling a year—representing the interest on a capital of £200,000. We deal with large sums, gentlemen. Monsieur Lonstonnau, I expect you have anticipated my next question."

With a slight smile the Managing Director bowed, and opened a leather portfolio lying on the table.

"I have prepared a graph, Monsieur le Chevalier," he said, handing a paper to Dupin. "You will see that the claims rise in magnitude—roughly in a geometrical, rather than in an arithmetical, progression. It looks as though our claimant is greedy—"

"Or merely pressed for time," said Dupin idly, taking the graph and casting his eye over the ascending curve limned on the squared-paper. "Were the curve to be extended, following its present pattern, your Company would face the necessity of meeting claims of half-a-million francs *each,* before less than six months would have passed. But of that, gentlemen, you are already well aware. Now, before I give you my views on this serious matter, let me hear again—briefly, succinctly—what so far has happened."

A footman brought coffee and tea to the assembled company, and when he had retired, Monsieur Lonstonnau explained himself thus: "The claimant is one Adolphus Smith. He is English, but his family have been settled for many years—perhaps as many as thirty—at Lille, where his father set up a cloth manufactory on English principles. The father is dead, and Mr. Smith carries on the business. His widowed mother lives with him; he is unmarried. He has three places of residence—a large house in the country, outside Lille; a cottage, small but well furnished, on the grounds of his factory, where he spends most of the week; and an apartment in the Rue de Grenelle, a few doors from the Embassy of Austria and Parma."

Monsieur Lonstonnau consulted his memorandum-book and continued, "He lives modestly, but it has been ascertained that he has contracted an irregular association with a young person from the Théâtre des Variétés—who is *not* so modest in her way of life. However, there is nothing so far to indicate that, even with the expensive tastes of his mistress, Monsieur Adolphus Smith is living in excess of his income."

"But we cannot be *sure* of that," said Dupin drawlingly. "Or are your methods of inquiry such that you may be certain you know everything about this gentleman?"

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"Our methods are exemplary," said Monsieur Lonstonnau, not without a touch of arrogance. "We have a special department for investigation which rivals in competency that of Monsieur G——, the Prefect of the Parisian police. I venture to think that ours is even more competent, since we reward good work and punish failure. Our investigators, then, have an especial interest in proving themselves diligent and skillful. They have gone very deeply into Monsieur Smith's background."

"I believe you even without having discovered why he needs this dishonestly acquired money—if, indeed, his claims be fraudulent—or how he causes these fires. Pray describe the fires, and the reasons for your suspicions, Monsieur."

"It would be more fitting, Monsieur le Chevalier, if I said that our suspicions were first aroused by the *frequency* of the fires. Of course, though we are bound, as a Fire Assurance company of good standing, to meet every *bona-fide* claim, we are not bound to continue insuring a man so unfortunate as to have *too* many claims."

"Why then did you not refuse his business after the first conflagration?"

"Well, we are a Franco-British company, with offices both in Paris and London, with capital equally divided between francs and pounds sterling, and with joint French and British Managing Directors. We advertise extensively in both the French and the British journals—and Mr. Smith, we are given to understand, does considerable business in England. He, too, has offices in London and Paris; and should people in England hear that a French company has refused a claim made by a British subject, they might, without knowing all the facts, conclude that French assurance companies conduct their affairs in a dishonest manner. In the circumstances—"

"You decided to give this Mr. Smith the benefit of the doubt and pay his first two claims. But now, with a third claim, you feel that coincidence may be carried too far, and that if Mr. Smith's claims are not fraudulent, then he is surely a most unfortunate business-man whose burdens an even more unfortunate assurance company need no longer shoulder."

"That describes it fairly, Monsieur le Chevalier," said the Duke de Larochefoucault; "but there is something more than mere suspicion which now points to Mr. Smith's guilt. One or two of the journals whose policies are opposed to that supported by Count de Schramm in the Senate have been printing paragraphs which hint at some forthcoming scandal as regards the affairs of this Company. By chance, we discovered that the source of the paragraphs was Mr. Smith, and that, in the name of his widowed mother, Mr. Smith has been buying our shares whenever the payment of a large claim has momentarily depressed the price quoted on the bourse."

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"That constitutes no legal proof," said Dupin.

"This we know," said Monsieur Lonstonnau. "But now let me tell you the circumstances in which *all* three fires have occurred."

"I observe that you stress the word 'all'," said Dupin.

"That is not the least remarkable aspect of this series of calamities," replied Monsieur Lonstonnau. "But you shall judge . . . The first of the three fires took place in the Rue St. Honoré, where Mr. Smith also has his Paris offices. Behind the counting-house and sample-rooms and other chambers proper to the business he conducts, there is—or, rather, there was—a large building that Mr. Smith used as a warehouse for his cloth. Besides being a manufacturer of cloth, he is also an importer—and if we may go by the size of his claims and the remains of the cloth burnt in the various fires, he imports only the best of English cloth."

"Permit me to interrupt," said Dupin. "Is Mr. Smith insured against the loss of profit on his destroyed goods as well as his original cost?"

"I take it you are asking whether it would be to Mr. Smith's interest to burn his cloth rather than have it left, unsold, on his hands. The answer is yes—it would so profit him."

"We have, then, established a plausible motive for arson; but in the event of an Assurance Company's paying out on a total loss, any small salvage would then be the property of the Company?"

"Just so. It is this commercial rule which enables us to take possession of the building, with its ruined contents, and, of course, to conduct the most minute examination."

"You found no tangible evidence of arson?"

"Not a clew," said Monsieur Lonstonnau, "save the fact that one fire after another broke out in premises made as fire-proof as possible. But if you mean, did we find traces of any combustible substance, of any infernal machine, the answer is that we did not."

"Yet the premises *did* catch fire?"

"Ah, the premises did catch fire, as you observe. To have his warehouse near his offices—for it is reasonable that a customer be taken to a near-by warehouse to be shown the cloth in piece as well as in swatch—Mr. Smith took new premises at the back of the Rue St. Honoré; and again—after the second unfortunate conflagration—he found premises in the same back street, which he then proceeded to make fire-proof and once again to fill with the finest English and French cloth."

"Describe in detail what he does to make the premises fire-proof. Is his method, by the way, acceptable to you?"

"If it were not somehow connected with the eventual fires which seem to arise spontaneously in Mr. Smith's premises, yes, we should approve.

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It consists of lining the warehouse, up to the windows of the second floor, with quarter-inch sheet iron imported from Birmingham. No artificial light of any kind is permitted—the light from the windows having to suffice. This means that all business in the warehouse has to be done within the hours of daylight. Only one outside door is allowed to function, the back-door being closed permanently. This functioning front-door is constructed like the door to a strong-room, and only the night-watchman has the key. Even Mr. Smith would have to ask the watchman to let him in after the regular hours of business."

"By whose rules?"

"By Mr. Smith's. But our investigations have proved that Mr. Smith sticks very rigidly to his rules."

"And how do the fires break out?"

"We do not know. The single operational door is locked; the windows —which have metal frames and panes of thick glass—are firmly secured from the inside by patent locks; there is no sign of forcing from without, nor of arson from within. Here we have a completely closed room—a sealed room—full of cloth. The one door that concerns us is closed and locked. The watchman has the only key. Examined after the fire, it is clear that the door has remained locked throughout, and that no person has broken into the warehouse."

"And the pattern of the conflagrations is always the same?"

"Always. To the most minute detail each fire resembles the previous one."

"You are aware that the presence of a living person is not necessary to start a conflagration in a closed and vacant room?"

"We are not only aware of that fact," said Monsieur Lonstonnau, "but you may accept our word, Monsieur le Chevalier, that our investigators know precisely what to seek."

"They looked for the lead tube in which two acids are kept separate by a thin wall of copper through which one acid eats—to burst into flame when it meets the other acid?"

"That first of all, Chevalier."

"The thin pipe of gutta-percha along which coal-gas may pass, to burst into flame at the top when the gas encounters a small fragment of spongy —or what is called 'black'—platinum?"

"That, too, Chevalier. I assure you that every known way of causing a fire in the absence of a human agent was carefully sought—and none was found. Have you any suggestions, Chevalier?—we cannot hold up payment of this third claim much longer; if we do, our good faith will come under suspicion and our shares are bound to fall—"

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"And Mr. Smith," observed Dupin reflectively, "may well be the largest buyer of those shares. But tell me one thing: you used the phrase, in discussing these spontaneous conflagrations, 'in the absence of a human agent.' Have you, then, positive proof that the premises were untenanted by even a single person when the fires occurred? Where was the night-watchman?"

"He lodges near-by, in a small alley between the Rue du Plâtre and the Rue des Blancs-Manteaux, just before one comes to the Rue Rambuteau."

"I know it. As you say, it is not far distant from the Rue St. Honoré. He does not, then, sleep on Mr. Smith's premises?"

"No. His duties consist in accompanying Mr. Smith on a most careful tour of the premises, after it has been ascertained that every *employé of* the firm has taken his leave for the day. Then, with Mr. Smith always preceding him, the watchman locks what he now knows to be premises empty of human beings. Mr. Smith goes his way, and the watchman goes his."

"His work for the day is finished?"

"By no means. He does not 'sleep in,' as they say, but he returns to the premises regularly throughout the night—not actually entering the warehouse, but meticulously examining all outward portions, especially the doors at front and back, to see that all is in order and that no unauthorized person has effected an entry."

"Just so. But if this other person had not *broken* his way in, but had merely opened the door with a key—"

"There is no other key in existence."

"So you have been informed, Monsieur, and so you are now informing me. But duplicate keys are easily cut. How do you know that one such key does not exist and that it was not used to gain entry?"

"Because after Picquet—that is the night-watchman's name—locks the front-door with a double-turn, the key-hole is covered and sealed in an ingenious manner. Packing threads are passed through two small eyelets brazed to the metal of the key-plate. The key-hole is then covered with a hinged brass plate, and the threads that have been passed through the eyelets are crossed over the hinged plate and then sealed by the watchman."

"How is it sealed?"

"With a lead seal—the watchman carries the double-punch with him."

"The punch provided by Mr. Smith? It would have been simple for Mr. Smith to provide himself with a duplicate."

"Not so. In addition to the seal's gathering up the threads which cover the key-hole—which cover, rather, the plate which covers the key-hole—a scrap of paper is inserted, which has been signed and dated by Picquet. It

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would, of course, have been possible to reproduce this complicated sealing, even to the forging of Picquet's hand. But it so happened that the seal was found intact after each conflagration, and Picquet has testified unequivocally to the fact that the paper bore his own hand—and not that of some forger's. We have carefully interrogated this Picquet. He is an old soldier, in receipt not only of his Army pension but of the two hundred and fifty francs pension given to all soldiers who earned their *Légion d'Honneur* before 1814. He lives simply, and is proud of having served the late Emperor so faithfully—and two Kings after *him*. If our knowledge of human nature may count for anything, Chevalier, you may accept our word that Picquet is innocent of any felonious association with Mr. Smith's diabolical plot."

"I am happy to accept your assurances on this point, Monsieur Lonstonnau. We have, then, the problem of the hermetically-sealed room—in this case, a hermetically-sealed warehouse—yet one in which fires break out which could hardly have been accidental. You very carefully examined the front-door to see that, despite the ingenious sealing, it had not been opened secretly? Of course! Are there locks on the unused back-door as well as on the front?"

"The back-door can be locked only from within—by heavy bolts. It cannot be opened from the yard to which it gives access. It had not been opened."

Dupin said, with an air of profound reflection, "Do you observe, gentlemen, how much time we have given to the consideration of the *door?* I invite you to think of that fact. However, Monsieur Lonstonnau, there is yet another point on which I should like to see some light cast. Cotton goods are prohibited from entry into France. What type of fabric does Mr. Smith import from England? Saxonies, worsteds, tweeds—cloths of that nature? Indeed! Yet cloth of that substance is surely the least *immediately* combustible? But you tell me that all the cloth was destroyed?"

"Not destroyed in the literal meaning of the word, Chevalier—merely rendered unfit for commercial use. As for the cloth catching fire, that is easily explained. The cloth is not stored in unwrapped bolts, but parcelled up in a patent English water-proof packing—a sort of heavy cartridge-paper, its outside coated with a mixture of gutta-percha and pitch, and that covered with a light scrim. You may well appreciate how readily that would burn!"

"Indeed. And you say that Mr. Smith was nowhere near the premises when the fires broke out?"

"Did I say that? Yes, Mr. Smith is well provided with an *alibi*. We have gone thoroughly into the matter—with the help of the police."

"Where was he?"

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"In England's embassy," said Monsieur Lonstonnau dryly. "He had called, it appears, on a matter connected with the import duties payable on his cloth."

"But the English Embassy is—"

"Yes, we know, Chevalier—the Rue St. Honoré, Number 39—not far from his place of business. Nevertheless, he was with his country's Ambassador when all three fires broke out, and nothing we can do will gainsay that fact."

"In that case, he has employed an agent."

"We agree. So much is obvious. But who? All our inquiries eliminate Picquet. The *employés* seem equally innocent. Mr. Smith has no apparent *homme d'affaires*. Does this agent then exist, Monsieur Dupin?"

"I am sure he exists. Therefore, gentlemen, I go to find him."

Finding ourselves back on the busy Boulevard des Italiens, it seemed to Dupin and myself that a relaxation at one of the pavement tables of the Café de Foy might prove congenial, and provide me with an opportunity to hear Dupin's views on the mystery of the arsonical Mr. Smith.

After we had ordered our *tisanes* of the waiter, and had watched the busy traffic of the Boulevard des Italiens for several meditative minutes, Dupin suddenly observed, "I am perfectly content to accept as fact Monsieur Lonstonnau's assurances that, whoever Mr. Smith may have as an accomplice, he did not send this accomplice to the warehouse in the Rue St. Honoré on any of the three nights when a fire broke out. We shall examine the premises, of course, but Monsieur Lonstonnau's investigators—as well as those of the police—will have questioned the neighbors thoroughly. At this task the investigators both of insurance companies and of the police are above reproach. We may take it that no one was seen entering the warehouse, and that, in fact, no one either entered or left.

"This leaves us with the necessity of finding out who acted as the agent which reason tells us was necessary to set the fire-raising mechanism into operation."

"But, Dupin, I am confounded! You said that Mr. Smith had no agent."

"I said that he had no *accomplice*. Yet *someone* must have done what was required. Must we then look for an *innocent*, an *unwitting*, accomplice? An accomplice, we might say, *malgré lui*? It rather looks like it."

"But, Dupin," I urged my friend, "have you not first to establish the *modus operandi*—the means by which this man has caused fires at times when he had unimpeachable witnesses to prove that he was never present when the fires broke out? After all, Dupin, a careful search of the premises has not revealed any infernal machine which could have caused the fires."

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Dupin smiled in a vastly superior fashion.

"By 'revealed' I take it that you mean, 'revealed to the investigators of Monsieur Lonstonnau and of the police'? That is not quite the same thing. I fancy we shall find more than these investigators discovered. And once again I call your attention to the fact that, as no doubt Mr. Smith intended, our attention has been directed to the *door*—as though in this door lies the whole solution to the mystery."

"Why should Mr. Smith wish our attention to be called to the door?"

"Possibly so that our attention be removed from something far more important. But come, if we walk down the Rue de la Michodière, we shall be at Mr. Smith's warehouse—or warehouses—within a minute or two. I have an interest to see Mr. Smith's front-doors!"

No agent of Monsieur G——, the Prefect of the Parisian police, nor of Monsieur Lonstonnau, the Managing Director of United Assurances, ever scrutinized premises more carefully than did Dupin in examining the three charred and empty warehouses in which Mr. Smith had kept his valuable stock.

As we finished the examination of the third fire-damaged warehouse, I ventured to express regret that we had found nothing to confirm the suspicions of the Assurance Company's Directors.

"Why, how so!" Dupin cried, in affected astonishment. "The fact that the unfortunate Mr. Smith had three similar fires in two years would amply justify their suspicions. But you mean that you think no trace of an ingenious fire-raising apparatus has been discovered by us?"

"You have shown me nothing so far."

"Ah, indeed! Well, come outside for a moment and—yes, pray close the door. Now, what do you see?"

We stood on the paving-stones of the Rue St. Honoré, watched with the deepest interest by neighbors who lounged in doorways or hung out of windows, and surrounded by the sort of *gamins* or street-arabs that any stranger was sure to attract. Knowing the breed, I did not further encourage their attentions by taking notice of them.

"I see a plain door," said I, "covered, to all appearances, with sheet iron which has been rivetted to the wooden frame."

"What else?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, come! *Nothing?* Is there not a door-knob? Is there not a key-hole, at present covered with a plate, which has been sealed with a complicated arrangement of packing thread and lead seal? Bravo! You are learning to be observant! Very will then: what *else* do you see?"

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I thought this a singularly childish crochet of Dupin's, and suspected that it was all being arranged for the mystification of the street-arabs and their watchful parents. But Dupin, correctly interpreting my facial expression, shook his head, smiling, and I realized that he did, indeed, wish me to enumerate the trivial details upon which my eye fell.

"Very well, then . . . but I see nothing. There is nothing more."

"I agree," said Dupin, in a grave voice. "You are right. There is nothing more. But the *absence* of something must then be taken into account. Come now, let us visit the worthy ex-Corporal Armand Picquet, my fellow *chevalier*—though of the *Légion d'Honneur,* and not of St. Louis—and see what he remembers of this curious affair."

From our talk with Picquet we took away only a paper on which Dupin had caused me to write down the exact times when the obviously methodical night-watchman had called at the premises of his employer.

"From this list, Monsieur le Caporal, I see that the fire, in each case, occurred between the time that Mr. Smith and yourself locked up the premises at 5:00 P.M., and your first call of the night, at 7:30 P.M. In actual fact, the fire appears to have occurred—or, at any rate, was first seen by the neighbors—at about 7:00 P.M. Now, there is another matter on which I should like your guidance. From my inquiries, I have learned that, in locking up each night, Mr. Smith invariably preceded you in leaving the premises?"

"That is so, Your Excellency. 'You first, sir!' I always say, and the gentleman goes out first. It's his own rule, Your Excellency, and very strict he is, sir, to see I keep to it. 'You're the governor from now on, Picquet,' he'd say; and he'd leave me to see that all was fastened down tight. Just like the Army, sir."

"Now," said Dupin, taking out his pocket-book and extracting from it a five-franc piece, "I wish to recompense you for your time. As the great Emperor used to say, time is money—and we should not despise it." The old soldier's eyes flashed at this respectful mention of his hero, and I could see that he would now willingly fall in with any suggestion that Dupin might care to make. "Come with me to this door on the landing, Corporal, and let us go through the movements which were customarily made on your leaving the premises with Mr. Smith."

I watched, and saw the various steps of this innocent play-acting—but I noticed that the Corporal said nothing as Dupin laid his arm across the old soldier's back, and that, in fact, though seeming to leave first, Dupin was actually *not* the first to step outside. A few moments more, and we were walking once again toward the Rue St. Honoré.

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"Where to now, Dupin?" I asked.

"To make some inquiries relative to the administration of the *Petite Poste* of Paris. And it suggests itself to me that we might well make our inquiries of the *bureau d'arrondissement* in the Rue St. Honoré, seeing that it is the local post-office of Mr. Smith. I mean, it will be from the post-office in the Rue St. Honoré that Mr. Smith's letters are delivered. Tell me, if Mr. Smith had letters sent to him, to which address would you expect them to be directed?"

"His business letters I should expect to be addressed to his offices; his private correspondence to his apartment in Paris or to his country-house outside Lille."

"Just so. You would not expect that any correspondence would be addressed to any of the warehouses which have been so unfortunate as to catch fire?"

"No, of course not. Why, Dupin, do you think there was some explosive substance in a letter!"

"No," said Dupin coolly; "you saw for yourself that there was no letter-slot in the front-door through which a letter could be passed into the premises."

"No, but the postman could have pulled the bell-knob."

"Ah, you noticed there was a bell-knob, did you?"

"Of course there was a bell-knob. Was there, then, *no* infernal machine or other fire-raising device?"

"There was, indeed!" said Dupin, with a laugh. "But here we are at the post-office. Let us find the postman who delivers Mr. Smith's mail."

The Director of the post-office—one of the fourteen important *bureaux d'arrondissement,* inferior in rank only to the General Post-office in the Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau—received us with that affability which senior French civil servants always show to those who come armed with the correct introductions.

"At your service, Messieurs," the Director greeted us. "Command me! I am entirely at your disposal."

"Tell me, Monsieur le Directeur," said Dupin, "at which hours of the day is the post distributed?"

"As regularly as the clock which orders our discipline: at seven o'clock in the morning; at half-past nine; at twelve noon, exactly; at two, four, and six o'clock in the afternoon. The last delivery is at six o'clock. I talk, naturally, of Paris; deliveries in the *banlieue* are only two a day, save on the routes to Bercy, LaVillette, and so on, which have four posts a day."

"I was talking only of Paris. Now, sir, if a letter is delivered by the *facteur* and there is neither concierge to accept the letter nor letter-slot through

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which the letter may be pushed—so that the letter cannot be delivered—what happens?"

"The letter is brought back, marked with a stamp that delivery has been attempted at such-and-such an hour, and is then put in the next post, when a further attempt will be made to deliver it. After several attempts the letter is diverted to the *Bureau des Rebuts,* where it is opened, and either sent back to its writer—if there is an address—or destroyed."

"May I see the postman who delivers letters to the street at the back of the Rue St. Honoré in which the fires have occurred? I should like the man to accompany us back to the scene of the fires, where I am making some inquiries on behalf of my friend, Monsieur G——, the Prefect of the Parisian police, and of Messieurs de Larochefoucauld and de Doudeauville who insured the property."

After the casual mention of these important names we had not long to wait, and presently a quiet, middle-aged postman was walking with us to the scene of the third fire.

Arrived there, Dupin said, "Now, Monsieur, it is necessary that we repeat the actions exactly of the night on which you delivered—or attempted to deliver—a letter here, and then returned to the post-office. It was, as it happened, the night on which these premises caught fire, though that had nothing whatever to do with you. Pray show us precisely what you did."

The man, with a quizzical glance at me, opened his mail-bag, took out a letter, advanced toward the front-door, pretended to search for a letter-slot, knocked with his fist on the door, and then, finding the bell-knob, caught hold of it with his hand, and gave it a strong, sharp tug. Distantly, we heard the jangle of a bell. As on the previous occasion, no one came in answer to the summons.

"Thank you," said Dupin, handing the man a handsome *pourboire.*

"Before we present the facts for the consideration of the proper authorities," said Dupin, "let us briefly consider them." We were still standing before the warehouse's front-door.

"It was clear to me that we had to do with an arsonist. The only problem was: how did he contrive the fires? There are a number of ways in which vacant premises may be set afire, but either they need the presence of an agent to effect the lighting of the fire, or, if an infernal machine is used, they leave *some* traces of such a machine.

"Now, what Mr. Smith needed was this: first, an irrefutable *alibi.* Next, he had so to *time* the fire that he could be away from the premises when it broke out. It does not seem to have occurred to anyone that the *alibi* could protect Mr. Smith only if he had *control* of the time the fire occurred.

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"Next, he had to cause a fire by means which did not involve the uses of such mechanical or chemical devices which invariably leave evidence to trap their inventors or users."

Dupin pulled a small silver box from his waistcoat pocket, and opened it to reveal its contents—several lucifer matches, of the type called "Congreves," which strike on any surface which is sufficiently rough.

"Here is Mr. Smith's infernal machine," said Dupin dryly.

I was thunder-stricken. Congreve matches!

"But, Dupin, who actually set fire to the premises if it was not Mr. Smith?"

"The postman. Simple, was it not? Come here inside the door and put your finger beneath this length of square-sectioned iron to which the knob of the bell-pull is attached.

"Ah, you observe that it is rough?—that it has been roughened? Now, let us suppose that I am Mr. Smith and that you are Picquet. We know that the premises are vacant, and we are now at the front-door. I say, 'Everything is in order, Picquet. We may confidently lock up.' I *seem* to go first—but, as I go out, I place my arm in a friendly manner across the old Corporal's shoulders. He takes this to be merely a friendly gesture, but it is not. I have previously draped a ball of cotton-waste over the rod which connects the wire of the bell-pull to the knob itself. Hanging down is a length of naphtha-soaked rope, or some such innocent-looking but highly combustible substance.

"Now, as I leave I have my arm across the Corporal's shoulder, and I have simply to place the head of a Congreve match into the space between the rod of the bell-pull and the channel in which it runs.

"Now I *do* go first, and stand there while Corporal Picquet locks the door and proceeds solemnly to go through the charade of covering the key-hole and sealing it thoroughly.

"We were invited, enticed, to concentrate all our attention on this obviously closed and sealed door—too obviously closed and sealed—so that we should not look at the *still open way* into the premises. I mean the knob of the bell-pull.

"For observe. The door is closed, locked, and sealed. It is now five o'clock. Picquet goes to his humble apartment, and Mr. Smith to his grander lodgings, to make his toilet for the meeting with the English Ambassador. At six o'clock the postman arrives with the letter that Mr. Smith himself has addressed to the improbable destination of the warehouse. The postman knocks; there is no answer. The postman then pulls at the knob of the bell.

"Hidden from him by the heavy iron-plated door, the Congreve match,

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rubbed by the swift motion of the bell-pull's rod, bursts into flame, ignites the cotton-waste, sets fire to the dangling rope, and so to the tar-and-gutta-percha-wrapped bolts of cloth. The postman waits only a few moments, hears only the bell; but no one answers, so off he goes."

"But the smoke—"

"Not through the door—the door was sealed," Dupin said, smiling. "Picquet had carefully stopped up even the key-hole through which, I admit, smoke might have emerged and thus ruined Mr. Smith's precious game. But even that danger had been foreseen by our ingenious arsonist, and fully guarded against. The fire was left to take hold, while the innocent agent employed by Mr. Smith walked away."

"How could Mr. Smith count on the postman's delivering the letter at six o'clock?"

"By posting a letter at the *bureau d'arrondissement* of the Rue St. Honoré between four and five o'clock, when the *boîte aux lettres* is cleared. Experience would have shown Mr. Smith which post he must catch in order to insure delivery by the six o'clock mail."

"And how shall you convict him of his guilt, Dupin?"

"I? Oh, I shall attempt no such thing. So long as I can explain to G—— or Monsieur Lonstonnau *how* Mr. Smith carried out his plan, I may safely leave it to them to persuade Mr. Smith to an admission of his culpability. Extracting confessions is not my *métier;* it is theirs. It is a *métier,* though, in which they shine."

CRIMINALIMERICKS

THE FIRST ONE *by D. R. BENSEN*

The Chevalier Auguste Dupin
Said, "Can it be? Yes, it is. *Hein!*
Here is that letter—
What hiding place better
Than none at all? *Et c'est la fin.*"

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A short-short gem of the first water—with atmosphere, tone, ingenuity, human interest, and a gently satisfying surprise . . .

THE NOSE OF A BEAGLE

by ARTHUR PORGES

THE OLD MAN STOOD AT THE EDGE of the cliff, peering down at the sea. He wore a floppy hat and a dark cloak made of rough, hairy cloth. As he squinted at the pounding surf, he poked at the ground with a battered walking stick.

Once his mobile mouth drooped wryly, as he remembered long months of terrible seasickness that nothing could alleviate. Only by a remarkable effort of his will—and an enthusiasm for work that could not be quelled—had he managed to carry on in those days.

His blue-gray eyes were mild, almost vague, but they missed little. He saw the two ravens harrying a great falcon, and marveled at their rashness. But then, few birds are better aerial acrobats, or more able to protect themselves in flight. He noted a dragonfly pouncing on a bluebottle; and then the old man stooped to peer intently at a furze plant that showed a sexual anomaly that even an expert botanist might have missed.

But he had to cut his examination short. A man was approaching, walking with long strides; he wore a uniform, and had an air of authority.

"Arr," the newcomer said, panting a little. "Master Francis said as 'ow you might be up 'ere."

"Surely it's Constable Newby," the old man said, giving him a keen glance. Stationed at the village of Down, about a mile away, the official represented British law in the area. "I hope nothing is wrong at home," he added, his face growing suddenly anxious.

"Oh, no, sir. It's nothing like that." The constable paused, as if embarrassed, which was indeed the case. What had seemed such a good idea an hour earlier now appeared somewhat ill-conceived. Still . . .

"Then what can I do for you—ah—it *is* Newby?"

"Yes, sir; that's my name. The fact is, there's been a killing near the village, and a terrible dust-up all around."

"Dear me!" the old man exclaimed, stroking his long beard. "Who's dead?"

"It's 'Papa' Karolyi—the gypsy what goes all around with 'is barrel-organ. Stabbed, 'e was, and it looks like Tom Bennett, 'e done it."

"I don't think I know either of them," the old man said, giving Newby a rather quizzical stare.

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"You wouldn't, sir; they baint the sort that quality folks 'as any doings with. Tom Bennett, 'e's nowt but a troublemaker. Poacher, thief, bully —that's Tom. Old Karolyi, 'e was 'armless—not but what 'e wouldn't steal a bit—all them gypsies will."

"I don't quite understand," the old man said, jabbing at the loamy earth with his stick. "I've told you I know neither of them. Why do you come to me?"

"Arr; I shouldn't 'ave. I see that now. But, then . . . everybody says as 'ow you're such a wonder with a microscope and cuttin' up animals, and I thought—" He broke off, red-faced and confused.

The old man's mouth twitched briefly. But he was of a temperament that verged on the angelic; he had never done an unkind thing in his life; his family and friends adored him. Which was a bit ironical, considering some of the charges that had been made against him by strangers and the way in which he had been reviled publicly.

"Tell me about it, Constable," he suggested pleasantly. "Indeed, I'm far from clever with my hands; I succeed—when I do—only by patience and determination, because I am so infernally clumsy . . . However—"

"Well, sir," Newby said, brightening. "Old Karolyi was stabbed, like I said. And Tom Bennett, 'e done it, all right. But 'e was too drunk and foolishly wiped the knife on 'is own shirt. And now 'e says the blood's 'is own—and 'e 'as a cut on 'is 'and to prove it, worse luck. A lot of people 'eard 'im and Papa quarreling. Tom was pestering 'is daughter, Rosa, and Karolyi wouldn't 'ave it. She was to marry a gypsy—that's 'ow it 'as to be with them, d'ya see." Once again the constable stopped, looking hopefully at the old man.

"Yes, I see. But just what do you want of me?"

"I was 'oping that you could 'ave a look at the knife and the shirt, too —'orrible dirty *that* is, I must say— and tell me if it's Papa Karolyi's blood or Tom's."

The old man shuddered. He had always hated the sight of blood. His bushy eyebrows rose, and he pulled off the floppy hat, showing a bald head fringed by white hairs.

"I'm very sorry, Constable," he said softly. "You're asking the impossible. Nobody in the world can do that. Oh, I might be able to say if it's *human* blood—if the red corpuscles aren't too deteriorated. But as to whose—no, no. Not this year. It will come—but perhaps not until the Twentieth Century—which I'm afraid I shall never see."

"Oh, lordy. And I thought with that there microscope o' yours . . . I can arrest Tom Bennett, but gettin' a conviction, what with no witnesses, and that cut on 'is 'and, which 'e made 'imself, surely—arr." Then he added coaxingly, "Why not 'ave a look at 'em anyway? You might think of something; you're an educated man—wonderful

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learned, they say. 'Ere—take 'em." And he held out the grim bundle. "The knife's wrapped in the shirt."

The old man shuddered again. He was neither weak nor vacillating, although a hater of controversy. More than merely a gentleman, he was a gentle man, and the difference in their classes made him unwilling to offend the constable.

Gravely he opened the bundle and nervously examined the knife—a very nasty item with a well-worn, cruel blade. The steel had been rather carefully wiped, but a gummy residue remained at the hilt, and he studied it closely. Then his nose wrinkled, and the blue-gray eyes suddenly assumed a hooded appearance. He brought the shirt nearer to his face, peered at the recent stains, and to Newby's amazement, sniffed them.

"Would you happento know," the old man asked, "what the two men ate at their last meal before the—ah—murder?"

"It so 'appens I does," the officer said. "Karolyi, 'e stopped in Down and bought some sassidge. An' Tom—well, I know about 'im because 'e used that there very knife to cut a big wedge o' Stilton at the same shop. That's when they was slangin' each other about Rosa. And it wasn't three hours later that Bennett killed the gypsy. Harker—it's 'is shop—told me about it, and about Tom's knife."

"Sausage," the old man said musingly. "What kind?"

"Just sassidge. No; I remember. Harker did say as 'ow 'e kept it kind o' special for Mr. Bandini and a few others. And for Papa Karolyi, too. Not for our kind—chock full of garlic, 'tis."

"Ah," the old man breathed, his eyes bright. "How very odd that I should have been reading Bernard only last week. I myself know little about physiology—except of barnacles, and they don't eat sausage," he added with a twinkle.

"Arr?"

"If you smell the knife—and the stains on the shirt—you will detect the undoubted scent of garlic. It's a fact, according to Bernard—he was a famous French physiologist, Constable, and a great man—that garlic is one of the few substances that gets quickly into the blood after being eaten, and the essential oils give it that characteristic smell."

"Lumme! You mean that since this 'ere blood smells o' garlic, it 'as to be Papa Karolyi's?"

"You said that Tom Bennett ate cheese—no sausage. So it couldn't be *his* blood."

"That's right!" Newby cried, gazing at the old man in awe. "Specially when the likes o' you says so."

"I can't appear to testify," the old man hastened to warn him. "My health is quite bad, you know. I fear that even this little excitement may exact a heavy toll tonight. You must take the case over on your own. But I can send you the reference to Bernard's findings."

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For a moment the constable's face fell; then it showed a distinct smugness. All the credit to himself; not a thing to bemoan.

"Arr," he said. "Trust me; you won't be summoned, sir. And, anyhow, I make no doubt Tom'll confess when he 'ears about the garlic—it's a real crusher, and 'e ain't the kind to stand up against it for a minute." He looked at the old man, and sucked in his breath. "You're a wonder, sir, a fair wonder. The nose of a beagle, you 'ave, sir—beggin' your pardon, sir. They was right about you."

"Thank you, Constable," the old man said, absurdly pleased. His name was known all over the world, and more favorably now than before; but the officer's unsophisticated tribute touched him. "It was nothing at all—just a stroke of luck, I assure you."

And with a wave of his stick Charles Darwin set off for home.

NEXT MONTH . . .

Special ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Issue

10 *NEW* stories—including

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the *NEWEST* short story by

CHRISTIANNA BRAND

Mr. Gerald Fletcher-Store had no way out. He simply had to do it, and he had to plan every detail with the most scrupulous care. And this time, in this matter—the crucial one of his life—he would not fail . . .

HERE LIES . . .

by CHRISTIANNA BRAND

"GOOD HEAVENS," SAID MRS. Fletcher-Store, "what a revolting jacket! Where on earth did you get it?"

"I bought it off a man in the pub," said Mr. Fletcher-Store.

"A man—what man?"

"*I* don't know—just a man."

"You really should be more careful what you buy off strangers in pubs," said Mrs. Fletcher-Store. "It's awful. Looks like a dead sheep, turned inside out."

"Good lord!—just what he said *his* wife said." He looked down at the jacket doubtfully, flattening his chin against his chest. The jacket was a brightish tan, true, but heavily fleece-lined and he'd fancied it had a—well, a bit of a Raff-ish look . . . And suddenly lost in reverie, he saw himself, flailing his arms to shrug on the jacket as he ran across the tarmac to his waiting plane. "I thought it looked rather good," he said.

"You thought it looked like the jolly old R.A.F.," said Mrs. Fletcher-Store, pronouncing it Raff. "Wizard prang, old boy, and a couple of crates in the drink in my time, what, what; and if you don't believe me—as well you may not!—a handlebar mustache to prove it." She looked at her husband with something very much like loathing. "How I've lived all these years with such a miserable phony!"

"I *was* in the Raff," protested Mr. Fletcher-Store.

"For six months. On the ground. And never saw a kite fly, except on Hampstead Heath. The ugly truth is, Gerald," she said viciously, "that you're a phony, a rotten, bombasting phony, trying to cover up from all the world, yourself included and especially, that you're nothing but a dud and a failure—never did a decent job in your life, never kept a woman in your life—except me, because I'm sorry for

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you; never even made a friend, except a few miserable pick-ups in pubs, bought with drinks you can't afford. And now selling you jackets you can't afford either."

"All right, all right," said Fletcher-Store. "I know."

"*You* know? You don't know and you don't want to know."

"I don't suppose any man wants to know that sort of thing about himself. Especially if it's true," he said. "And I don't think it really does any good, quite so constantly reminding him of it."

"Then don't go off spending money at that rotten little pub in Hartling and buying a lot of rubbishy tripe we can't afford. You seem to forget that what money comes into this house is made by me. You with your shoddy little half-baked short stories—"

"All right, all *right*," he said again. "Skip it. I've got the message. No more purchases in pubs." And he added, half to himself but loud enough for her to hear it, for it always galled her that he was the better educated of the two: *"Hic jacet."*

"Hick jacket?" she said. "What are you talking about?"

"I was making a pun, dear," he said sweetly. "In Latin. It means you've slain me in the battle of the jacket. *Hic jacet*—here lies . . ."

But she got the last word as usual, after all. "Oh, well," she said, "you were always good at that." He heard her footsteps pounding up the stairs, moving about the bedroom as she changed for her evening swim. After a little while the front door banged.

He waited five minutes to be sure she wouldn't come back for anything, and then went out to the tool shed where he kept his bottle of whiskey; she let him go to the pub only rarely, so this was next best. Just the right tot, or one's brain got fuddled, and he had some hard thinking to do.

He carried the bottle back to the sitting room, pulled up a chair to the moonlit window, and sat down to go on thinking out his plan to murder her.

On the whole, Gerald had decided, the odds were in his favor. For a start there need be no hurry; the sooner the better, certainly, but there might yet be a certain pleasure in listening to her increasingly frequent tirades, when each word added fuel to a funeral pyre already crackling.

And then there would be no obvious motive. No "other woman"—one reason for coming to this ghastly hole had been, according to Elsa, to get away from the "other-woman" menace; and certainly here, candidates were nil.

And no money interest: they could just about eke out on her scribblings and his own, living cheap on the fruits and vegetables and eggs he was supposed to provide by his work on the small farm. Small farm! A vile old pig and a

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lot of scrawny hens, and all that manuring and digging—he, who in his day . . . And he fell into a reverie again of those old wild, wonderful times of the ditched crates and the pranged kites and the boon companions boasting together of the exploits of others—never of one's own, by George!—over the tankards in the jolly old hostelries . . . And after all, given the chance, might he not have been one of that splendid company too? A man was not born to failure; surely it must be fair to say that it was bad luck that had made him one?

Well, in the matter of Elsa's murder, he would not fail.

The house was isolated—three miles from the hamlet of Hartling, six from anywhere else, fifteen from the Cathedral city inland. No neighbors, therefore, to be inquisitive; no friends even, as she had truly said—not here or out of the past. No friends—only the little world of public-house acquaintances, the Bills and the Barbaras, the Noras and the Toms, drifting in from the evening, drifting out into the night, nameless, homeless, without existence for one another beyond the lit bar and the clinking glasses, the boasting and the well-worn jokes.

Well, all right, he thought, no friends, so no one to stand as witness to the real motive—that tongue of hers that could strip a man down, bare to his shuddering soul, and was to be endured no more.

The murder, he had decided, would have to be by drowning.

She had been a well-known athlete in her day—had leaped higher or run faster, he never could remember, than anyone in the world or in England or only in Surrey; he never could remember that either. But first and foremost she had been a swimmer; she cherished old photographs of herself, half out of the water in the back stroke or the butterfly or whatever it was, forging along, tiny and sinewy, the vanquished spluttering in her rear.

Those days were gone and the muscle was now turning to thick white fat; but she struggled, all honor to her, to keep it down and she still loved to swim. That had been the main reason for settling in this house, so near to the tiny deserted bay of Kittle Cove; and there she swam, morning and evening and could never get enough! All alone—for such pastimes were not for Gerald Fletcher-Store—she would run off, the old regulation black woolen bathing suit under a bright beachrobe, tucking up beneath the white bathing cap as she ran, her rough, curly brown hair.

Twenty minutes alone there, along the wild, forsaken cart road, twenty minutes back, and half an hour or more swimming around. "Keeps you fit," she would say, slapping the back of her hard little hand against his flaccid paunch.

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"I've got enough to do to keep me fit, digging in that filthy garden," he would say, ill-temperedly.

By drowning, then. An "accident," of course. But with such a good swimmer as she was, who would believe in an accident? His mind in the past had toyed, over a second whiskey, with wild dreams of stopped-up snorkels and punctured water wings, but she had no truck with such things; she simply plunged in and swam to a rock far out, and dived off the rock a few times and swam around about and then swam back. No records being created, no foolish chances taken; no difficult currents to beware of. Just straightforward swimming for the sheer love of it.

If she were to drown then, she must do it while her murderer was well out of the way. To just go down there, push her head under the water, and then run screaming for help—that wouldn't do at all.

His wandering mind seemed to stand still all of a sudden, seemed to come slap up against the idea and just remain there, contemplating it. It had been those words: "Push her head under the water."

What was drowning, after all, but water forced into the lungs? You could drown in three inches of water in a basin; you could drown in your bedroom at home just as easily as you could in the open sea.

And then if you were *found* in the sea . . .

Force her head into a bowl of water and drown her. Then carry her down to the sea and throw her in. A detail here: could they tell if the water in the lungs was salt water or fresh? Fetch a bucket of sea water then, and drown her in that. And tip that away somewhere safe, too—no salt-encrusted pipes or wilting garden flowers to give the game away.

But what difference between "finding" her dead in the sea, and having actually drowned her there? They could still say you had pushed her head under the waves and then gone for help. An alibi—that was what he was going to need, an alibi.

And his mind had got going again and was working cold and clear. Drown her here, put her body in the trunk compartment of the car. Have somebody in the house for an hour at least, while Elsa was supposed to be sporting it down in the bay. Get rid of that somebody, drive down to the cove—"I began to get anxious when she didn't return"—dump her in the sea, fish her out again, and then go for help. Time of death established by the post-mortem—a couple of hours earlier; but a couple of hours earlier he would have been sitting chatting, safe at home.

Only—chatting with whom? Who, in all this wasteland of dank woods and distant coastline and beastly narrow lanes, would come to sit for an hour and chat with

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him? And on the very night the accident would be set to occur. Not a soul had ever been to this house during the ten months of their resentful occupancy; every evening he sat, while Elsa went for her swim, and banged at his typewriter, listlessly trying to bash out a short story. She would not let him write during the day; the hens and the pig and that horrible vegetable garden claimed him then. She said that his stories earned less than the produce from their land, and that was true. But when she was gone, he thought, off in reverie again, he would do not one more hand's turn on that filthy soil. If he had all day to write and no sneering interruptions from her—then, damn it all, he could really get going, he could really make a big thing of it; he *knew*.

An alibi, then. Someone who would keep him company for an evening.

He could go to the pub, of course. What about that? Leave her dead, drive over to Hartling, spend an hour there, drive home, "find she wasn't back," drive on down to the cove, then the program as before. But who was to say that he had not done just this?—drowned her before he came to the pub, gone back and pretended to find her. No; someone must actually see her start off to the cove, alive and well; someone who would then spend the next hour and a half with him.

And he got up to wash out the whiskey glass and put it away before she got back; he dropped the glass and, picking it up, pricked his thumb on a splinter, and thought exultantly: "That's it!"

It made him sick to do it, but when the time was ripe he contrived to get the fingers of his left hand entangled in the blades of the lawn mower; and making rather more fuss than was necessary over the mangled mess—but that was in character—he said to his wife, "What on earth shall I do? I've got this commissioned series hardly started and I can't type a word with this." The series—six short stories of the wartime R.A.F.—had, needless to say, been commissioned by Mr. Fletcher-Store and by no one else.

"Oh, well, Gerald, you really are too careless for words," said Elsa.

"I didn't do it on purpose, my dear, did I?" he suggested, grinning up his sleeve.

"Can't you write it in longhand, the way I do?"

"I can't write in longhand, you know I can't." This was true. Every author has his own eccentricities and she was writer enough herself to know that unless he saw the words before him in print, no words would come.

"If I could type," she said, "I suppose I'd have to do it for you; only I can't." It was typical of her to resent the very idea of doing for him—of doing what she was not going to have to do anyway.

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"I suppose I shall just have to chuck it in," he said.

"Chuck it in! The first and only chance of actually making a little decent money out of this rubbish of yours." She thought it over. "I suppose we couldn't find a typist anywhere in this God-forsaken hole?"

She had said it. She had actually suggested it herself. He had already reconnoitered in the pub at Hartling; now he went off and returned triumphantly to say that a female named Mrs. Butcher, whose husband worked late shifts or overtime or something, had been a typist before her marriage and would be very happy to drive over in her Mini-car for an hour or two each evening to help him out.

He would think over the stuff as he dug and delved, said Gerald—for the bad hand was not to stop him from the necessary work with the vegetables and hens—and then she could take it down in shorthand, type it out next day, and bring it back.

So Mrs. Butcher, small, diffident, genteel, began to make her appearance at regular intervals. Elsa continued to go morning and evening for her swim. And concealed in the tool shed stood a bucket of salt water, ready for The Day.

There remained only to set up a scapegoat, just in case by any chance the fact that Elsa had not drowned naturally might somehow come to light. He began to drop small hints into the receptive ear of Mrs. Butcher who was ever so surprised that Mrs. Fletcher-Store should care to go swimming all alone even on these moonlit nights.

"Yes . . . Well . . ." said Gerald, not actually speaking the words "if she *is* alone," and then permitting himself a sigh and resolutely going forward with the work. And he would see Elsa off—taking his time about it, to accustom Mrs. Butcher to a ten-minute absence—and come back into the room wearing a troubled look, a look of wretchedness resigned.

"Got to put a good face on things," he once volunteered to Mrs. Butcher, and seemed about to blurt out a confidence but, thorough gentleman that he was, bit the words back. Mrs. Butcher exuded sympathetic understanding, but she remained mute. What she thought of Mr. Fletcher-Store's Raff reminiscences also remained unspoken.

The day came—an evening of moonlight, conveniently obscured by drifting patches of cloud. While Mrs. Butcher sorted out her work, he walked to the gate with Elsa and a short way down the path, as he had recently taken to doing—"to be out of Mrs. B.'s way—she gets into such a flap." Beyond the gate were some heavy rhododendron bushes and behind these he had left the bucket of salt water, and next to the bucket, the fleece-lined jacket.

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"Good heavens," said Elsa, in her irritable way, "what on earth's that jacket doing here?"

"I must have dropped it," he said, not bothering what excuse he made; and he stooped to pick it up. And in a moment the jacket was round her body, back to front, and tightly belted, pinning her arms to her sides, its over-long sleeves muffling her hands and the possibility of her scratching claws.

Then he whipped out the bucket and pushed her head down into it. She fought and struggled with all her wiry strength, but he was half her weight again, and she was strait-jacketed in wool and leather.

Even before he could have hoped for it, it was all over. He pushed the body in under the bushes, tipped the water out of the bucket, hurried back to the shed, and left the bucket there with the jacket. And in no time at all he was back with Mrs. Butcher, a glass of whiskey in his hand. "Well, now," he said, "let's get on."

But the hand that held the glass was shaking and, "You look rather pale, Mr. Fletcher-Store," said Mrs. Butcher, all little-woman concern.

Even this he had prepared for. "Damn hand's pretty painful," he confessed. "Didn't want to say anything." And indeed the struggle with Elsa had wrenched unpleasantly at the bandage, and the whole thing was now violently throbbing. "Digging celery today; probably opened up the wound a bit." He had even dug some celery, to make that ring true.

"I don't think you should be using it, honestly I don't, for all this heavy outdoor work."

"Someone has to do it. Not that I mean . . . Clever woman, my wife, you know," said Gerald stoutly. "Got to stick to her writing—that's where the money lies. Famous in her day, you know. Not much fun for her, stuck out here," he added, after what appeared to be a moment's rueful reflection. "Not after all that. Damn good-looking she was, you know, and a bit of a girl for the—" But he broke off, looked away, and took a gulp of whiskey. "All quite innocent, Mrs. Butcher, of course."

"Oh, of course," said Mrs. Butcher, playing up to dear Mr. Fletcher-Store's conjugal loyalty.

"Not many people around here, Mrs. Butcher? I mean," he said, putting on an air of surreptitiously feeling his way, "not many people of—well, our sort of age, you know? No one she could pal up with?—she and I, of course I mean."

No, Mrs. Butcher knew of nobody this side of Hartling, and after that it was—well, a very *church*-y crowd, all centering on the Cathedral, all turning their backs on this part of the country and facing toward the city. "It's mostly farmhands and so on who go to the pub in Hartling; even the farmers go into town for their

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amusements, these days of fast cars. Fred, my husband, he works for old Lord Hartling, you see, or we wouldn't be living out this way, I can assure you. If, any time," said Mrs. Butcher timidly, "you and Mrs. Fletcher-Store would care to drop in on *us* for an evening—but I'm afraid I wouldn't be much company for someone like her . . ."

Mr. Fletcher-Store made civil noises but she could see how abstractedly he gazed out of the window toward the bay where his lady was supposedly disporting herself in and out of the water with her hypothetical love. "Well, I suppose we must get on, or we shall never get done."

By the time Mrs. Butcher was ready to leave, Elsa, strange to say, had not yet returned. "If I were you, Mr. Fletcher-Store, I'd be getting quite anxious. Won't you run down to the cove and see that everything's all right?"

"Well, yes," he said uncertainly, "I suppose I could."

"I mean, it's getting very chilly. She can't still be swimming."

"That's just it," said Mr. Fletcher-Store.

"You mean—? But, Mr. Fletcher-Store—oh, no! You can't really mean—"

"One doesn't like to seem to be —well, spying."

"I could come with you," suggested Mrs. Butcher. "I would, if you'd like me to. Then it wouldn't look as if—"

"Good heavens, no!" said Gerald violently. He covered up quickly. "I couldn't let her have the humiliation of being—well, being found out—with a stranger present."

"But you don't know. It may be all quite untrue. If we were to go down together, talking quite loudly so as to make ourselves heard . . . As you say, it would be horrible if she were quite innocent, and suspected you of creeping down to keep a watch on her."

He shook his head heavily. "I'm afraid, you know, it's all too true. I've—well, to say it flat out, Mrs. Butcher—I've *seen* them." And in reverie he *had* seen them—strolling together across the wet sands, Elsa amorously gay, swinging the white bathing cap in one hand, her rough brown hair all curls; the man with his arm around her, a big chap, dark and good-looking.

"A dark man, Mrs. Butcher, broad-shouldered, good-looking." He confessed, a bit shame-faced, "Actually, that's why I was—well, sort of fishing about just now, asking you about the people round here."

"You actually *saw* her? With this man? But . . . It could have been just a chance meeting?"

"Then why didn't she tell me about it? And anyway, this wasn't any chance meeting. One—well, one *knows,* doesn't one?"

But Mrs. Butcher didn't know and evidently didn't want to know. "I'd better go," she said, "and

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leave you to deal with it. I think you should—well, I don't know what to advise, Mr. Fletcher-Store."

And she got into her little Mini and wobbled off down the rutty lane toward Hartling. To suspect naughty assignations by moonlight was one thing, Mrs. Butcher's departing rear light seemed to say, winking in and out like a glow-worm as she sped through the night; but to *know*—that was much too much like horrid real life.

He went back to the rhododendron bush. Elsa was still lying there as he had left her. He ran to the tool shed, rinsed out the bucket—no telltale salt there—caught up his jacket and returned to her again. As he had hoped, the thick, soft wool lining of the jacket had prevented weals on her body and arms from the struggle.

He picked her up—strangely leaden, she was, who in life had been so small and energetic—and he had to fight back nausea at the feel of her, hanging so limply, yet so heavily, in his arms, and carried her to the car.

It was not a very large trunk compartment but he had better put her there; not that there was the faintest chance of his meeting anyone, but—well, to be on the safe side, to leave nothing to chance. A bit of a joke if there really was a lover, waiting for her down at the bay! However, surely he'd have gone home long ago? Better keep a lookout for any footprints, just in case.

It was slow going, down to the cove. The moonlight obscured and distorted the ruts and holes in the rough cart-way, long unused; the car jerked and jolted—he was terrified of what might be happening to the curled-up body in the trunk compartment, what marks might be inflicted that later could tell tales. But he got her there at last and parked the car in deep shadow, and stood looking down at the bay.

He had not been able to spend much time in reconnoitering—she might have thought it suspicious; and now he must work out how best he could get her down to the water without leaving traces whereby a keen-eyed policeman could observe that he had borne across the sand a burden just as heavy as the one he had carried back. He must pick a way carefully through the rocks that ran down on either side of the cove, and hope the fast incoming tide would wash away whatever traces he might leave there.

First, however, he must run straight across the sand—straight across and then this way and that, as though calling to her, searching for her. The sands would in time be covered by the tide but one might as well take no chances; and it would give him a legitimate reason, moreover, to look behind rocks and in the single small cave,

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just in case any observer might be lurking there.

But there was nobody; nor had there been—the sand was completely unmarked. Then he recollected that it should not be altogether unmarked—there should be prints of her own progress down to the sea. Well, he would have to make sure that no alarm was given until the tide had covered all—so, in fact, his artistic running about of the past ten minutes had been wasted. Never mind; there was time enough.

He walked along through the ripples to the line of rocks and picked his way up through them, back to the car.

She was jammed in pretty tight; it took further time getting her out without inflicting scratches and bruises. But he had her out at last and staggered with her, slipping and stumbling, back through rocky ways. Slipping and stumbling, carrying his murdered wife in his arms—the moonlight brilliant, patching with silver the rippled black-treacle of the sea, the great rocks throwing nightmare shadows on the unscuffed sand. His arms ached, his back was nearly breaking, and his damaged hand throbbed and bled through its bandage. He was almost physically sick with the strain of it by the time he reached the water's edge.

Along this broken coastline nothing was simple; the bay was broken across by a row of rocks, at this moment of the tide's incoming, already six inches above the water level. He splashed with his burden to a place on the seaward side and there gently laid the body down—not for all the hounds of hell could he, as once he had proposed to himself, have flung her down or even let her fall; he knelt and turned her softly out of his arms, and let her lie—let her lie there in the shallow water, face down in a cleft of the rocks, with the dark sea lapping over her, soaking her, salting her, weighting down the black woolen bathing suit with the damp drift of the sand, smearing with it her dead face and arms and hands, submerging her, silting her up as though all the time for those past hours she had been lying there.

He had put on his bright tan jacket against the night chill and was now content to lean back against the rock and recover some of his strength before he must lift her once again, dripping now with sand and sea water, and carry her back to the shore. Some of his strength, and some of his courage too. "Stop thumping!" he said to his racing heart, and "Be still!" he said to his churning stomach and fogged, sick, swirling brain. "Pull yourself together. It's all over, it's finished now."

And it was all over, all finished. Nothing could go wrong now; there was no false move he could make. He had only to lift her up, go back to the bay with her, put

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her down somewhere above the highwater mark and drive like a mad thing into Hartling—for they had no telephone at home—with the tragic news. The very first informed eye to see her would recognize that she had long been dead.

Meanwhile, gasping, leaning back, spent, against the rock, while the little ripples washed their evidence over his wife's dead body, face down in the sand at his feet—meanwhile he forced himself to run through the whole thing in his mind, just to make sure. Black bathing suit, white bathing cap, all correct—Mrs. Butcher had seen her leave the house in them; the beach-robe would logically be up there somewhere on the dry sand. The bucket of sea water had been emptied out and rinsed; and who would look for signs of a drowning under a clump of rhododendron bushes at their gate? His own hands and arms were free from scratches and the jacket had kept her unmarked by the struggle before death; any marks made after death would surely be accounted for by the two hours of submersion, abraded by the rocks and the sand. He had examined the trunk compartment of the car to see that it held no signs of the rough journey to the bay; and with every moment the tide was creeping up over such marks as he had made while he carried her down through the rocks.

There was nothing to fear, nothing—even signs of agitation on his part would be explained by his natural distress. His wife had been seen to leave the house alive and well; he had been in Mrs. Butcher's company for the following hour and a half; examination would prove that Elsa had been dead during most of that time. And if all else failed, if accident ever came to be doubted—there was still the scapegoat lover who could never clear himself of suspicion because in fact he did not exist.

"All right," he said, grimly muttering to the still body lying at his feet, "a failure I may be and you've told it to me often enough. But not this time, my dear—not this time!"

And sick with the effort of it, yet still resolute, he picked her up and gathered her to him and holding her in his arms, the white cap cradled against his shoulder like a lover with his lass, he stepped out from behind the rock and onto the beach.

Someone was there now. A small thin figure standing uncertainly, looking out across the sea.

He saw that it was Mrs. Butcher. Well, all the better—just exactly what he needed. Curiosity alert, she would have gone home, thought it over, crept back to do a bit of Peeping Tom and to see what it was all about . . . And could now be a first-hand witness of the tragedy.

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He stood there, holding the lolling body cradled in his arms, and put on a face of grief and desperation as he waited for Mrs. Butcher's advance.

And she advanced, screaming out suddenly, sharp and shrill, flying down the steep slope of the bank above and across the sands toward him, running, screeching—"You brute, you filthy, cheating, lying beast, pretending you were working late when all this time—"

And then she was on him; and as, beneath the violence of her assault he stumbled and half fell, spilling the body to the sands, she plunged into his breast the kitchen knife she was holding in her hand.

And she lay there for a moment, spreadeagled across him, tumbled over on him by the violence of the knife thrust. Then she raised herself and looked down and screamed out, "Fred? Oh, my God, it isn't Fred! Oh, God, what have I done?"

And she beat at his blood-drenched breast and cried, "But you told me it was Fred! You said he was here with her every night, making love to her you said; you said you *knew*. A big man, you said, dark and handsome—well, isn't that Fred? What other man is there round here that looks like that?—only Fred."

And as his red lifeblood ebbed away, sinking into the white fleece, oozing out through the gashed tan leather above his heart, she sobbed, "And this is Fred's jacket. The minute I saw it, I knew it, this—this horrible jacket of Fred's . . ."

As Mrs. Fletcher-Store had long ago said, Mr. Fletcher-Store should have been more careful what he bought from strangers in pubs. And meanwhile—

Meanwhile—*hic jacet*. Here lies...

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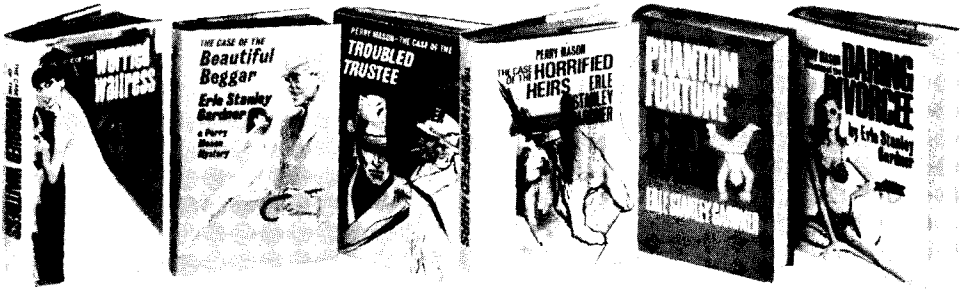
—Continued from other side



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